ABOVE THE INFLUENCE: THE STRATEGIC EFFECTS OF AIRPOWER IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

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ABSTRACT

This study comprises an analysis of the strategic effects of airpower in irregular warfare. The author derives a theoretical framework for irregular warfare to isolate what make it distinct from other forms of conflict. The conclusion is the state versus non-state actor dynamic imposes specific limitations on the ways and means of strategy each side may use in pursuit of its ends. Next the writer evaluates the history of airpower and airpower doctrine with respect to irregular warfare. The results are that three fundamental differences characterize the employment of airpower in irregular conflicts: a greater subordination to political restraints, a higher sensitivity to the degree of centralized control, and the primacy of indirect effects, namely *influence*. The author then examines the use of airpower in the Vietnam War during three periods of distinctly different strategy: 1954-61, 1961-65, and 1965-68 in order to evaluate study's theoretical propositions. The study concludes with recommendations that the Department of Defense modify its irregular warfare doctrine and that the USAF take an approach to the employment of airpower in irregular warfare that centers around the concept of influence rather than targeting.

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Introduction

Why do we need a study of Irregular Warfare, Airpower, and Strategy?

Despite America's long history of involvement in such conflicts dating back to the Revolutionary War, the US has not invested in long-term capabilities or doctrine for "irregular" warfare. The American way of war at the turn of the twenty-first century had become the application of technologically-enabled violence against a targetable enemy. Irregular warfare (IW), as a concept, was still mired in the unfortunately titled "military operations other-than-war" (MOOTW), a catch-all phrase for the nebulous, costly, and intractable military activities ranging from peacekeeping in the Balkans to hunting Somali warlords. It was, in effect, something else to do while pondering the uncertainty of a post-Cold War future. During the past nine years, the US Government has struggled to understand and adapt to irregular warfare. In the finest tradition of history repeating itself, the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have spawned a resurgence of writing on the topic, most of which use historical accounts of previous conflicts to draw lessons for the current ones.[1] Doctrine is again catching up to real events.

Though there will likely never be consensus regarding a definition of irregular warfare, the concept is gaining acceptance. Previous debates centering around the end of traditional warfare[2] have given way to more nuanced attempts to place irregular warfare into the larger history of war—not unique, not entirely permanent or static, but different nonetheless.[3] Some view the unmatched potency of American military power as a reason in and of itself that challengers will use irregular means to contest American interests in the future.[4] In an attempt to make sense of the protracted situations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in the larger Global War on Terror, the Department of Defense (DOD) put significant thought toward understanding some of the problems its soldiers encountered. The 2006

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[1] See for example Austin Long, *On 'Other War' Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research.* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2006).

[2] See for example Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*. (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991), 224.

[3] See for example James Kiras, "Irregular Warfare," in David Jordan, et al, *Understanding Modern Warfare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 225-291.

[4] Eliot Cohen, LtCol Conrad Crane (Ret.), Col Jan Horvath, and LtCol John Nagl, "Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency," Military Review, (March-April 2006), 53.

Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) defined and promoted irregular warfare to an equal footing—at least in policy—with "traditional" warfare.[5] This move effectively acknowledged its existence as a discrete, "out of the ordinary" concept and elevated its priority with respect to policy discussion and budget allocation.

Policy and budgetary importance aside, the DOD's adaptation to combat an enemy that did not abide by traditional military concepts is perhaps best exemplified by the successful, though still tenuous, pacification of Iraq during the "Surge" of 2007. The reality of the "Surge," however, is that it required a wholesale circumvention of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by a small group of "believers" who understood the intricacies of counterinsurgency (COIN).[6] The DOD, for its part, had been pouring billions of dollars into new gadgetry to counter increasingly lethal improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and to ramp up intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities—valuable contributions, but ultimately insufficient without a coherent strategy for achieving the desired endstate. Thus, the change in strategic approach in Iraq was accomplished in spite of the DOD, rather than because of it. The long-term effects of the success in Iraq remain to be seen.

Though the ongoing counterinsurgency campaigns have provided the impetus for including irregular warfare in DOD doctrine, the theoretical framework of irregular warfare remains ill-defined. Decades of conflation and outright confusion about several related and revolving concepts has produced a wide variety of opinions. Theorists claim that irregular warfare is either the same as, exactly opposed to, or just another passing phase in the history of war.[7] Others object violently to the term, asserting that it is so fundamentally flawed that it cannot effectively serve as a guide for strategy in war.[8] The

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[5] US Department of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*. (February 6, 2006)Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, , 3.

[6] Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009), 91-126.

[7] See for example Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001) and Frank Hoffman, "Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs," *Orbis* (Summer 2006): 395-411.

[8] Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege, "A Reflection on the Illogic of New Military Concepts" *Small Wars Journal*, (4 July 2008): http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2008/07/a-reflection-on-the-illogic-of-1/; and Barak Salmoni, "The Fallacy of 'Irregular' Warfare," *RUSI Journal* 152: 4 (August 2007): 18-24.

result is confusion. The ineffectiveness of American strategy in Iraq from 2003-07 illustrates the difficulty of understanding the dynamics of irregular warfare without an adequate conceptual framework.

Terminology and Conceptual Precision

This section has two aims. The first is to briefly trace the difficulties that have precluded a unified definition among theorists and practitioners. The second aim is to define the concept of irregular warfare in order to establish its position within the broader study of war. If one is to theorize about a mode of warfare, then one must first suitably define it. The term "irregular warfare" evolved from a long history of related concepts and similar terminology. Terms previously used to describe irregular warfare, such as "small wars," "low intensity conflict," "military operations other-than-war," etc., resurface occasionally, and a few never entirely disappeared.[9] The recent re-discovery of "irregular warfare" compounds a pre-existing problem of muddled and conflated concepts. The net result has been conflicting, incomplete, and cyclical doctrine, as each generation rediscovers and redefines the phenomenon, which in turn impedes clear and consistent thinking about how to fight in irregular warfare.

The task is further complicated by the the fact that the DOD's official descriptors for modes of warfare have evolved piecemeal and inconsistently with respect to common English language usage. For example, one might suppose the opposite of "irregular" warfare to be "regular" warfare, but it is not—the opposite is instead "traditional" warfare. For its part, "traditional" warfare has replaced the concept previously described as "conventional" warfare. These terms, of course, are not to be confused with "conventional war," which describes non-nuclear warfare. "Unconventional warfare," a logical term to describe everything that does not fit within the "conventional" or "traditional" categories serves an altogether different purpose. "Unconventional warfare" is now acknowledged as a specific subset of "irregular warfare." If not carefully defined, the term "irregular warfare" will only further confuse an already addled field of study.

[9] Michael Smith, "Guerrillas in the Mist: Reassessing Strategy and Low Intensity Warfare." *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 21. Smith catalogs 36 such related doctrinal terms ranging from "anti-colonial war" and "asymmetric warfare" to "unconventional warfare" and "uprising."

The DOD has struggled recently to remedy the problem of imprecision and bring its policy and doctrine in line with experiences on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Irregular Warfare Joint Operational Concept (JOC), first published in 2007, established a common definitional reference point for the military services. Its authors defined irregular warfare as "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations," and further explained that "IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will."[10]

The IW JOC also "promoted" irregular warfare to an officially recognized form of armed conflict, replacing the term "low-intensity conflict." It then offered a second, umbrella-like use for the term, which encompasses insurgency, counterinsurgency, terrorism, and counterterrorism, among other activities.[11] Unfortunately, the addition of "other activities" under the umbrella term dilutes the effectiveness of the definition. Instead of remaining focused as a distinctly separate form of warfare, the concept now also includes activities that are not unique to irregular warfare, such as psychological operations (PSYOPS), security, stabilization, and reconstruction operations (SSTRO), and intelligence activities.[12] The grouping of additional activities may aid the DOD's efforts to organize, train, and equip, but it also diminishes the clarity of the concept for the warfighter. Therefore, this study uses the following truncated version of the DOD's definition: "a form of conflict characterized primarily by violent struggle between state and nonstate actors." Having suitably narrowed the definition of irregular warfare the methodology and roadmap for the remainder of the thesis can be outlined.

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[10] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operational Concept (IW JOC), Version 1.0*, 11 September 2007, 6.

[11] Department of Defense, *IW JOC*, 6.

[12] Department of Defense, *IW JOC*, 9-10. The activities include: stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction operations (SSTRO); strategic communications; psychological operations (PSYOP); information operations (IO); civil-military operations (CMO); intelligence and counterintelligence activities; transnational criminal activities, including narco-trafficking, illicit arms dealing, and illegal financial transactions, that support or sustain IW; and law enforcement activities focused on countering irregular adversaries.

Methodology

This study ultimately seeks to define the strategic utility of airpower in the context of irregular warfare. Airpower has evolved from being "bombs on call" to a tailored, more precise force that provides armed security, intelligence, and mobility far more often than kinetic effects. It is often viewed as a set of capabilities that may set conditions for ground force operations or support them during execution. Airpower—like landpower and seapower—is but one in a combination of means, military and otherwise, that must be blended to produce an efficacious strategy. If irregular warfare is distinctly different from traditional warfare, then perhaps so is the utility of airpower to each.

In order to effectively evaluate strategy for a type of armed conflict one must first understand its nature. To this end, Chapter 1 draws on the ideas contained in classic works of military history, military theory, and a bit of deterrence theory in order to derive the theoretical differences between irregular and traditional conflict. The chapter then addresses how the theoretical aspects of irregular warfare relate to the formulation of strategy, or what can be thought of as a "theory of victory" during conflict. Chapter 2 extends the theoretical discussion to the utility of the air instrument as part of an integrated, joint military strategy for irregular conflict. It examines the history and doctrine of airpower's role in irregular warfare, using Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell's impossibly liberal definition of airpower, "the ability to do something in or through the air,"[13] to expand the discussion beyond individual service and agency capabilities. The chapter concludes with propositions about the fundamental differences between the effects of airpower in irregular warfare.

Chapters 3 to 5 employ historical case studies to illuminate and draw out some of the propositions presented in the first two chapters. The study employs essentially a single conflict, the war in Southeast Asia from 1954-1968, examined from three different campaign perspectives. These perspectives involve the use of airpower in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. The overarching political endstate or strategic objective common to all three air campaigns was the preservation of a free South Vietnam but each

[13] William "Billy" Mitchell, *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power—Economic and Military*. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2009)3-4.

relied on different elements of national power for reasons that shall become clear. As a result, airpower played distinctly different strategic roles in each. To examine those strategic roles this draws heavily upon a range of primary sources, including official histories, service military studies, historical documents, and the remarkable and unprecedented reports commissioned by Seventh Air Force as part of its Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) program. The analysis and conclusions in Chapter 6 draw together the lessons from each case and weave them into a coherent set of concepts and recommendations for use in thinking about airpower and strategy in irregular warfare.

Chapter 1

Theory and Strategy

By theory the significance of the observed is made manifest.

—Kenneth Waltz

Why Theory?

Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz perhaps best explains the utility of theory to a strategist. In attempting to develop a comprehensive theory of war, Clausewitz sought a tool with which "to analyze the constituent elements of war, to distinguish precisely what at first sight seems fused, to explain in full properties of the means employed and to show their probable effects, to define clearly the nature of the ends in view, and to illuminate all phases of warfare in a thorough critical inquiry. Theory then becomes a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls."[1] It is in such a spirit that this chapter seeks to draw out the theoretical underpinnings of irregular warfare.

Theory also serves to provide a degree of explanatory power. As international relations theorist Kenneth Waltz explains, "A theory arranges phenomena so that they are seen as mutually dependent; it connects otherwise disparate facts; it shows how changes in some of the phenomena necessarily entail changes in others. To form a theory requires envisioning a pattern where none is visible to the naked eye."[2] A well-constructed theory should provide one with a tool for identifying the underlying forces of a phenomenon that exert influence upon events in reality. Theoretical predictions are never perfect. Sound theory should, however, provide a formulation of what *might* happen. Despite the advantages of theory, it is never an adequate substitute for understanding the context and externalities of a phenomenon.

To that end, theoretical *propositions*—aspects or elements of a theoretical nature—are far more prevalent for the constituent components of irregular warfare than

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[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 141.

[2] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.(Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 9-10.

are unified theories. Classic and contemporary theorists alike examine counterinsurgency or *coup d'etat*.[3] Many provide accounts of past irregular conflicts in varying levels of detail, from which they deduce principles or lessons that may or may not be applicable to future conflict.[4] An unfortunate consequence is that such works result in piecemeal understanding of irregular warfare's true nature. A better approach is to derive by logic that which separates it from traditional warfare, keeping in mind that both are complementary subsets of war. A theory of irregular warfare then should ultimately assist in the formulation of strategy, loosely defined here as the linking of the *ends*, *ways*, and *means* necessary for the achievement of political objectives.[5]

The Theory and Related Concepts

Irregular warfare is a means by which to wage war—one possible method to achieve political objectives. In order to define what makes irregular warfare, "irregular," and therefore different, it is useful to first set a baseline definition for "regular" or "traditional" warfare. There is perhaps no more iconic military theorist of "traditional" warfare and war than Clausewitz. Though the world political structure has changed significantly since he wrote *On War*, Clausewitz was the first to reason through the concept of war as a means for achieving political objectives.[6] Despite its age, Clausewitz's description of the essence of war remains accurate: "War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers…his immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[7] This description is still useful for two reasons. First is the notion that war involves a series of actions against an intelligent, reacting

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[3] See for example, David Galula, *Counterinsurgency: Principles and Practice*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006); and Edward N. Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: a Practical Handbook* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[4] See for example, Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006).

[5] H. Richard Yarger, "Towards a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model." http://dde.carlisle.army.mil/authors/stratpap.htm. This is a very simplified adaptation of Lykke's concept.

[6] Clausewitz, *On War*, 88.

[7] Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

opponent. The second relates to victory, which Clausewitz suggests only occurs when one's adversary is no longer physically or mentally capable of competing.

In the context of irregular warfare, Clausewitz identifies the rationale for the variation in the nature of types of warfare. In the Napoleonic era, the means by which to achieve one's political aim was to "render the enemy powerless" by defeating him militarily.[8] The aim of rendering the enemy powerless is consistent in both traditional and irregular warfare. The two forms of war diverge, however, in the manner in which one goes about accomplishing those aims. Instead of two relatively symmetrical states with similar armed forces, the government of a nation-state is challenged by a violent opposition group—a non-state actor. Though the opposing sides are structured and resourced differently from one another, the competition is essentially for political power and must be won by somehow rendering the opposition powerless.[9]

State and non-state actors differ in the unique sources of their political power. A nation-state, for example, derives power from the resource base of its tax-paying citizenry and the institutional structure that authorizes its government. The state in turn exerts power primarily through its institutions, civil, military and otherwise. The non-state opposition derives strength from manpower and physical resources, but also relies heavily on an ideology or cause to unify its members and legitimize its activities. It projects power by limiting the ability of the state to exert its power and influence over its citizenry and territory.

Understanding the implications of this difference requires starting with the theoretical endstate of such a conflict—the attainment of the political object—and reasoning through the barriers to its achievement. For "only this approach will enable us

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[8] Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

[9] The following discussion on the state vs. non-state actor dynamic is an attempt to draw out the consistent structural dynamic from the body of historical literature of such conflicts. See for example Donald Robinson, ed., *The Dirty Wars: Guerrilla Actions and Other Forms of Unconventional Warfare*. (New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 1968) and Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History. Rev. ed.* (New York, NY: William Morrow, Inc., 1994). The theoretical approach discussed in the following pages, however, draws inspiration from the following works of Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr. *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*. RAND R-462-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, February 1970), particularly their discussion of asymmetries of structure and operations on 48-89 and 152-58; Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982); and, Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*." (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991).

to penetrate the problem intelligently…[and] show us how wars must vary with the nature of their motives and of the situations which give rise to them."[10] But for the moment, the political object itself is not as important as how each side attempts to attain it.

From the state's perspective, the enemy is ethereal. The non-state opposition is likely hidden, either within the population or outside of the state's sovereign reach. Burgeoning non-state movements must remain largely secretive until they have gained sufficient structure to openly challenge the state. The state, therefore, begins such a conflict with the disadvantage of being provoked by an enemy that it cannot see. Until the size and intent of the opposition movement is better understood, the state may also be limited to the types of action it can take in response to such provocation. The degree of legal rights afforded to its citizenry sets limits on the state's ability to use force within its own borders. Therefore, the acceptable ways and means with which to retain its power are inextricably linked to the asymmetric structure of the situation. Low levels of isolated violence may remain within the realm of law enforcement. Prematurely employing military means against one's own population may ultimately serve to bolster the opposition's cause and aid its recruiting efforts.

For the non-state actor, toppling the existing central government may not be initially possible. The initial lack of manpower, weapons, and freedom of maneuver to coordinate dissent severely limits the non-state actor's options. The group must somehow band together and clandestinely coordinate a plan to gain resources and tacit support in order to survive without drawing attention from the state. As violence creates a visible signature, attempting violent opposition prematurely jeopardizes the goal of long-term political power. Without first building a support movement, a non-state group has little chance of escaping the authority of the state.

This general asymmetry between state and non-state actors imposed by constraints on resources and actions is what essentially separates IW from traditional warfare. Thus a working theory of IW is based on three requisite elements. The first is a political object, in the form of governing power. The second is the employment of

[10] Clausewitz, *On War*, 88.

systematic violence or threat of violence to obtain that object. The third and last element is asymmetric limitation to the use of violence unique to each side.[11] These specific requisite elements form the basis for a working theory of irregular warfare. Any conflict that exhibits these characteristics can be considered irregular warfare. Conversely, the working theory also limits the scope as to the two activities and elements that should be considered irregular warfare. The first is an attack on an existing political power structure, either locally or in its entirety, such as the practices of unconventional warfare (UW), insurgency, and rebellion. The second set of activities and elements of irregular warfare include the maintenance of an existing political power, such as counterinsurgency and foreign internal defense (FID). The related concepts of terrorism, counterterrorism, psychological operations, and stability/reconstruction operations are habitually lumped by others into irregular warfare. As the working theory is defined, such activities are effectively demoted to the level of tactics within irregular warfare.

Strategy and Irregular Warfare

Having defined IW and specified its core elements, this section identifies how IW is unique with respect to the development of strategy. Theorist Colin Gray contends that irregular warfare is no different than traditional or any other mode of warfare when viewed in terms of the development of strategy.[12] He argues that the managing of the ends, ways, and means for the purpose of the war does not change appreciably with the type of conflict. While Gray is correct on a conceptual level, the unique ways and means that each combatant makes available for war aids in the understanding of irregular warfare. Such understanding is possible by using the working theory above, in combination with theories of strategy, to determine how the patterns of IW shape and affect the development of strategy.

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[11] The restraints each side places on itself: for the state, they are legal restrictions regarding the use of force against population within its own borders; for the non-state actor, they are limited to those actions that preserve its covert structure, at least initially.

[12] Colin S. Gray, "Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy," (March 2006): 4, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=650, 4.

4. Gray states that the reader should unequivocally "[f]orget qualifying adjectives: irregular war; guerrilla war; nuclear war; naval strategy; counterinsurgent strategy," and argues that "[a] general theory of war and strategy, such as that offered by Clausewitz and in different ways also by Suntzu and Thucydides, is a theory with universal applicability."

Levels of Control

IW has been described as "local politics with guns" which appears to be an excellent abbreviated description when one examines the history of such conflicts.[13] The purpose of this section is to explain why the phrase fits IW so well and more importantly, what the concept behind it means in terms of strategy. The essence of strategy, according to theorist J.C. Wylie, is gaining a degree of control over one's opponent: "[t]he primary aim of the strategist in the conduct of war is some selected degree of control of the enemy for the strategist's own purpose…The successful strategist is the one who controls the nature and the placement and the timing and the weight of the centers of gravity of war, and who exploits the resulting control of the pattern of war toward his own ends."[14] The idea of local, "armed" politics is therefore part of the greater concept of establishing control over the conflict's centers of gravity.

The idea of local armed politics is like strategy itself: simple in design but difficult to comprehend fully. In particular, several questions arise from it. For example, what exactly are the centers of gravity in irregular warfare? Are they consistent, or are they so highly dependent on the context of the individual conflict that they elude useful classification? What objects, when manipulated, will secure an advantage for one side over the other? Students of counterinsurgency will no doubt shout in unison "it's the population, stupid!"[15] This may be true but understanding the structural aspects of the conflict that *may* place a population at the center of each side's effort is more important.

If the manipulation of a center of gravity is to yield a measure of control over the "pattern of war," then that center of gravity is necessarily defined by its ability to provide that control. In a contested region that has a sparse populace, the population may be of little benefit in establishing control. Similarly, if a non-state actor is reliant on a regional

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[13] David W. Barno, "Challenges in Fighting a Global Insurgency," *Parameters*, (Summer 2006), quoted in Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operational Concept, Version 1.0*, (11 September 2007), 18.

[14] Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 77-78.

[15] This message, or a variation of it, appears in such works as Corum, "On Airpower, Land Power, and Counterinsurgency," 95; Cohen, Crane, Horvath & Nagl, "Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency," 50; Mao Tse-Tung, *Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla Warfare*, 215-216; Gray, "Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy," 37-38; Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 81-86; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, 17.

sanctuary to plan, train, and recapitalize its force, that sanctuary may function more as a center of gravity than the population. While IW is more often centered on a population, it is not always the case. Therefore, the first step in understanding an IW environment is determining its structural aspects first, which lead to a better understanding of the actual center of gravity and not defaulting to the answer which resides in doctrine.

Strategic Objectives: Control and Influence

For the state attempting to root out and defeat an opposition group that is essentially invisible when it desires to be so, depriving the enemy of his primary strength—invisibility—is a critical objective of an effective strategy. A host population, therefore, can serve as both a source of intelligence and a means by which to affect the resource intake of the non-state opposition. For non-state actors relying upon a host population for materiel, manpower, and intelligence, their reliance creates a pattern of necessary interactions to sustain and grow their organization. These interactions, in turn, expose habits, routines, and perhaps even identities to their hosts.

An opposition group operating in a vast nation with rugged terrain and porous borders may need little support or shelter from a sparse populace. Indeed, in such a setting, the opposition group may never seek the total removal from power of the central government. Instead, its leadership may be more inclined to force state authority out of a specific region and control a more manageable slice of territory. On the other hand, a small, densely populated island is likely to see no space go uncontested, forcing an existential confrontation between the two sides.

State presence roughly translates to a relative level of regional or local control. The variation in the level of presence creates regions that are more or less advantageous to non-state recruitment and growth. These gradients, when combined with the necessarily small size of an embryonic rebellion further dictate that the choice of operational location becomes a central element in the opposition's strategic calculus. The non-state actor will find it easier to operate in regions of minimal or no governmental control.

The critical aspect of this conflict is not the contested physical space, however, even though forces may clash periodically as one seeks to gain advantage over the other. It is neither necessary nor practical for the non-state group to take and hold territory—

that is, to saturate it sufficiently with personnel as to continuously exercise control. The structural limitations imposed by the state versus non-state dynamic dictate that the non-state actor remain physically dispersed, at least initially, and therefore concentrate its limited resources at a time and place of its choosing for specified actions designed to weaken the state's control.

A lesser degree of control can instead be achieved through maintaining sufficient presence as to be able to coerce the inhabitants into tacit support. This presence need not be entirely physical but it implies a required physical capacity to maintain that support. For example, an individual insurgent residing in or near a population center can effectively keep tabs on its residents and their interactions with government forces. These interactions can then be used to mete out punishment in the state's absence, thereby sending the message that collusion is both observable and potentially harmful or fatal. The degree to which the presence of one side is "felt" is a measure labeled here as *influence.* Presence *within the minds of the inhabitants* is a product of that influence, which ultimately gains a degree of control over their actions.

Belief in the government's ability to provide a relatively secure existence *for the foreseeable future* is counterbalanced by fear. Fear that the individual will be visited by members of the non-state group or that state agents will be driven from his home village, province, and then region ultimately serves to act upon his mind and influences his decisions. The state, on the other hand, must achieve a high degree of influence within its governed space in order to be perceived capable of protecting its territory and citizenry. The mere existence of a non-state actor that challenges the state's authority outside of the recognized political process—assuming one exists—weakens the state's influence and reduces the level of control it can exert over its governed territory. The longer the non-state entity persists within the confines of the state's borders, the stronger the message to the remainder of the populace that the state is either unwilling or unable to meet that challenge—and may be unworthy of their continued support.

As J.C. Wylie further observed, "final and ultimate" control is achieved only through presenting as inevitable "a man on the scene with a gun."[16] While it is essential

[16] Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 72-74.

that the state forces maintain their "man on the scene," non-state forces must also maintain the threat of visiting violence on those who betray them or those who would refuse them cooperation. Gaining influence over the population and the establishment of regional control are thus essential *ways* of strategy in IW.

Influence and Coercion

Thus, influencing the minds of individuals becomes essential to a population-centric conflict. The extent to which unaligned individuals act, or fail to act, in accordance with the desires of either side is the relevant measure of control over a contested region. The opposition must therefore devise a means by which to maintain influence over the minds of the populace without the burden of continuous physical presence. The difficulty is in attaining sufficient influence to gain compliance without crossing a threshold that alienates the majority.

The problem outlined above is essentially one of *coercion*. According to Thomas Schelling, coercion is achieved through the implied threat of relative pain: "the action or inaction that satisfies us costs him less than the pain we can cause…Coercion requires finding a bargain, arranging for him to be better off doing what we want—worse off not doing what we want—when he takes the threatened penalty into account."[17] In general, the greater the physical presence of one side, the greater the coercive effect required of the other to balance it. In areas under state control, the non-state actor must resort to those tactics that achieve the greatest psychological impact, such as terrorism or the creation of "shadow governments" that create the impression of constant observation, to gain or preserve its influence.

The asymmetry inherent structurally in IW requires each side to achieve the coercive effects it desires through different means. For a state to remain legitimate in the minds of its governed, it must project the image of presence and a degree of control over its sovereign territory. The state, by definition, possesses in the form of laws and customs existing parameters within which it must operate to retain its legitimacy, and perhaps a degree of external support. The legal and political restraints the state recognizes necessarily form a threshold of force it may employ to combat the non-state actor. While

[17] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 4.

this self-limiting behavior is also present in other forms of warfare, the threshold in IW is necessarily lower.

The non-state actor has few, if any such limitations, save those that are self-imposed. The non-state actor gains power through the reduction of state controls and the perception of state weakness in the minds of the populace. It may therefore be more profitable in terms of gaining coercive influence for the non-state actor to employ the most violent means available to increase the level of implied threat of violence to others. Coercion is a primary *way* of strategy for the non-state actor and the state alike; it is the *means* each side employs that differ.

Conclusions

Irregular warfare is a distinct form of warfare within the larger concept of war. Like other forms, its essence is a means for competition to gain political ends. It differs, however, from traditional warfare primarily in the means available to each opposing side and the ways in which they are employed toward the achievement of those political ends. Those means are essentially coercive and intended to achieve a degree of control. Where one side is strong, the other seeks to weaken that strength by gaining influence.

In terms of strategy, the non-state actor must choose its objectives carefully based on the relative strength of the state. Similarly, the state—once it is aware of and acknowledges the threat posed by the non-state actor—must make choices about how to employ its relatively superior, yet limited resources to counter an opponent that remains, for the most part, invisible. This relationship forces a strategy based on location to pit strength against weakness, particularly at the outset.

Thus the state is forced with difficult choices about where to allocate strength for the maintenance of control. Being unable to exert a strong presence everywhere, there must be coordinated thought given to the achievement of inherently local objectives, such as the maintenance of security or the denial of sanctuary. Only when armed with the understanding that a savvy non-state group will build a strategy specifically designed to exploit weaknesses in the state apparatus can the state begin to formulate an effective counter-strategy. One need only look to the nearly nine years of Taliban persistence—despite being militarily defeated in 2001—in Afghanistan to see this dynamic in action.

Where the coalition establishes a strong presence, the Taliban melts away and re-forms where coalition forces and the central Afghan government are absent or relatively weak.[18]

This chapter has explored the impact of the nature of irregular warfare on the development of strategy. In particular, this chapter has provided a number of insights which inform the use of military means a state may employ as part of its strategy against a non-state opponent. This thesis now turns to one of the means at a state's disposal: airpower.

[18] Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Hold Sway in Area Taken by U.S., Farmers Say" *The New York Times*, (May 16, 2010). http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/17/world/asia/17marja.html?scp=12&sq=taliban&st=cse.

Chapter 2

Airpower and Irregular Warfare

> *If there is one attitude more dangerous than to assume that a future war will be just like the last one, it is to imagine that it will be so utterly different that we can ignore all the lessons of the last one.*
>
> —Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John C. Slessor

History and Doctrine

Few scholarly works on airpower address irregular warfare. Much like the literature on irregular warfare, those works on the use of airpower in irregular warfare are either re-discoveries of long-lost "principles," or simply war stories.[1] These make for interesting ideas and light reading. Critical analyses of how well airpower contributed to the strategic outcome of an irregular conflict are rare. Furthermore, the larger body of airpower scholarship is dedicated to grander issues such as nuclear deterrence, strategic bombardment, and the burgeoning space medium. Airpower in IW is at best a niche topic or a distraction at worst.

This chapter first briefly reviews some of the relevant history concerning airpower's role in irregular warfare in order to identify consistent trends and concepts for the purpose of constructing a theoretical framework. Additionally, it examines the effects of that history on US military doctrine, particularly that of the nation's lead airpower proponent, the US Air Force. It then identifies the shortcomings of the current doctrine and defines what makes the employment of airpower distinctly different in IW as compared to traditional warfare. The chapter concludes with an alternate approach to that doctrine.

History

Contemporary airpower thought is a product of history. Tracing the broad outlines of the development of airpower serves here to emphasize the events and concepts that

[1] See for example James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Countering Insurgents and Terrorists*. (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003) ; and Col (Ret'd) Michael E. Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*: *US Air Force Special Operations during the Cold War*. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1997).

shaped current airpower doctrine. Though airpower initially served both irregular and traditional warfare equally, the utility of increasingly capable aircraft shaped how it would be employed during times of war. Both lighter- and heavier-than-air machines originally made their way into military service based on pure utility. Tethered balloons, for example, first provided a bird's eye view of the enemy as early as 1783.[2] Bombardment—in the form of dropping grenades and small bombs by hand while safely out of the reach of enemy weaponry—inevitably followed. In 1849 residents of Venice earned the dubious honor of becoming the first victims of attack by an unmanned aerial vehicle—an explosives-laden balloon.[3] In 1912 the first purposeful, manned "bomber" mission was carried out in the context of an irregular conflict by Italian armed forces in Libya.[4] Since roughly a decade following its inaugural powered flight, the aircraft held promise for those seeking to gain an advantage over opposing military forces and non-state actors alike.

Aviators in World War I discovered the utility of aircraft for observation, ground attack, and eventually to deny the enemy the unhindered use of his own aircraft. As range and performance increased, airpower theorists dreamed more efficient ways to achieve not just an advantage over the enemy, but rather victory itself. The sheer carnage of the "Great War" of 1914-19 need never be repeated. Theorists like General Giulio Douhet, General William "Billy" Mitchell, and Major Alexander P. de Seversky influenced the thinking of airpower strategists toward the quest for the defeat of an enemy without having to engage in costly land warfare. In the age of airpower, a nation no longer had to fight its way through its enemy's front lines to achieve its strategic objectives. Instead, higher-performing aircraft (and later, intercontinental ballistic missiles) could bypass the armies and navies on the ground and hold an adversary's "vital centers" at risk.[5]

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[2] John H. Morrow, Jr. *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921.* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 25.

[3] Morrow, *The Great War in the Air*, 1.

[4] See for example John Wright, "Aeroplanes and Airships in Libya, 1911-1912", Maghreb Review, v. 3 (1978); 20-22.

[5] All have built, to one extent or another on Douhet's and Mitchell's ideas, captured in essence in Mitchell's testimony before the House Committee on Military Affairs, February 5, 1926, quoted in Robert F. Futrell. *Ideas, Concepts, and Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force 1907-1960, Volume I.* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989), 49.

It is not surprising, then, that the history of airpower in irregular warfare exhibits the same view toward efficiency and a secondary emphasis on the strategic effectiveness of its capabilities. Aircraft were used in irregular conflicts in ways in which they were not intended or designed, largely in an improvised manner and to realize cost savings. British "air control" policy, for example, employed airpower as a replacement for costly ground troops. In an effort to maintain order over the vast British Empire, aircraft were substituted for soldiers to maintain a relative state of peace and order in its various territories.[6] Though the effort was successful for many years, it ultimately proved problematic for the long term stability of the colonial system.

Perhaps most notably, the British articulated what differentiated such "peripheral" conflicts from conventional ones. For the British, the main difference came from the difficult and vast terrain of the outskirts of the empire. They routinely adapted to jungle conditions, arid regions, and urban areas, the nature of which drove the need for short-field fixed-wing operations. They also learned that the true difficulty of prosecuting irregular warfare with airpower was that the destruction of a target was not nearly as difficult as finding the correct one in the first place.[7] Bruce Hoffman's review of Great Britain's successful historical record in integrating airpower to suppress insurgencies from 1919-1976 ultimately draws out the consistencies among the conflicts regarding the application of airpower:

> The uses of air power in these conflicts ranged from offensive air strikes to troop transport, to supply dropping, casualty evacuation, and aerial reconnaissance (both photographic and visual), to "sky shouting" and leaflet dropping psychological warfare operations. The array of aircraft used in these operations ran the gamut from medium bombers to STOL (short takeoff and landing) light aircraft, from jet-powered and propeller-driven fighter-bombers to helicopters. It involved regular RAF aircrews as well as local units, such as the Malayan Auxiliary Air Force and the Kenya Police Reserve Wing.[8]

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[6] For details see David Omissi, *Airpower and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

[7] Bruce Hoffman, *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict, 1919-1976*, R-3749, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 116-17.

[8] Hoffman, *British Air Power*, vi-vii.

Additionally, the British learned the value of "extraordinary inter-arm and inter-service cooperation," as well as building the air capability of the host territorial government, and supporting ground force thrusts deep into enemy territory via aerial resupply.[9] Thus Hoffman deduces the oft-repeated key functions that airpower plays against insurgents: (1) reconnaissance, (2) mobility and resupply (including casualty evacuation), (3) bombardment and fire support, and (4) psychological operations.[10]

What emerges, however, from pre-World War II colonial conflicts like those in British Somaliland, Iraq, India, and Palestine, is the fact that airpower's main role was to punish, coerce, and ultimately deter future uprisings, thereby maintaining Britain's control over the territory. As military scholars James Corum and Wray Johnson summarize, "air control meant substituting aerial bombardment for the traditional ground punitive expedition…a small force of airplanes was cheaper and more efficient, as it could inflict as much damage as a large and cumbersome ground force expedition."[11] It was no small advantage to those involved that punishing a wayward village through aerial bombardment was viewed as on par with similar ground actions; the nature of such an act was commensurate with the practices of maintaining an empire.[12]

The onset of World War II saw two key developments in the use of airpower. The first was the unprecedented strategic bombing air campaigns and use of tactical air for interdiction. The second development was the creation of specialized air units to support and sustain irregular warfare. Airpower enabled unconventional warfare and special operations in every theater of the war, including Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Pacific. The post-war force drawdown, however, ensured none of these specialized air units—and in fact, very few tactical air units at all—survived once the US Air Force gained its independence from the US Army in 1947. The leaders of the newest US armed service made choices about what types of equipment and skill sets it required to

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[9] Hoffman, *British Air Power*, vi-vii.

[10] Hoffman, *British Air Power*, 116-17.

[11] Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 58.

[12] Great Britain was not the only air-going nation to employ airpower in a punitive capacity. Both the US Army and US Marine Corps used aircraft in expeditions to such places as Mexico, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic during the 1920s and 30s. See Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 11-50.

accomplish what it believed as its core functions.[13] Thought on airpower after the end of World War II was necessarily focused against the existential threat of nuclear confrontation and the burgeoning nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union.

The Korean War brought an altogether new set of challenges for airpower. For the first time in its short history, the destructive capabilities airmen could bring against their enemies outstripped the nation's political willingness to inflict them. Still airpower was used in the Korean War in two key ways: regular missions, including bombing, interdiction, and close air support; and irregular missions, in support of partisan, intelligence, and psychological warfare operations. Small numbers of ad-hoc special air units infiltrated and supplied agents—largely gathering intelligence—behind enemy lines in support of the larger campaign objectives.[14] The result was a stalemate along the 38th parallel, achieved under the specter of escalation to nuclear war. Just as happened in the aftermath of World War II, the end of the conflict brought about the end of the ad-hoc specialized air units.

Perhaps the most prominent and lasting adaptation of American airpower to irregular warfare was General Curtis LeMay's answer to President John F. Kennedy's call for unique military capabilities to combat Soviet support in "wars of national liberation." In 1960, LeMay ordered the establishment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron, also known as "Jungle Jim."[15] While the design of entirely new aircraft and capabilities was well beyond the scope of the initial effort, the aircraft selected for the unit spoke volumes about its organizational importance: four fighter-bombers, four World War II vintage light bombers, and four twin-engine transports whose design pre-dated World War II. As these aircraft were sorely out of place compared to the USAF's "jet-age" inventory of the time, so was the mission of the program: to build indigenous airpower capabilities by advising and training indigenous aviators. In effect, they were to enable the South Vietnamese military to fight against the

[13] Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, and Doctrine, Vol. I*, 240-50.
[14] See Haas, *Apollo's Warriors*, 10-93.
[15] Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 79.

Viet Cong using their own capabilities.[16] Though the mission would shift and expand and the unit designation would change, as discussed in Chapter 4, the concept behind the unit remains relevant to this day. What is important at this point of the study is the larger pattern of airpower enabling irregular warfare on an ad hoc basis, within conventional conflicts, and subsequently either being forgotten or disbanded once the need passes.

Lessons Learned and Re-learned

One way in which doctrine evolves is through the distillation of experience into lessons that inform judgment about the future employment of military power. Ideally, a military service examines its past performance and identifies shortfalls in its doctrine, organization, tactics, equipment, and training, in order to make improvements. The history of irregular warfare, specifically in terms of airpower and doctrine, occurs in cycles. These cycles consists of the following phases: post-conflict lessons appear, are incorporated into doctrine, and then disappear from doctrine a short while later.

During the early 1960s, the USAF commissioned the RAND Corporation to hold symposia in an effort to capture lessons from the employment of airpower in previous irregular conflicts in anticipation of a deeper American involvement in Southeast Asia. The result of RAND's efforts were six transcripts that described the character of airpower's contribution in each of the following conflicts: Chindit, or long-range penetration operations in Burma (1944); Allied resistance on Luzon (1942-45); Unconventional warfare in the Mediterranean theater (1940-44); the Malayan Emergency (1948-60); the anti-Huk campaign in the Philippines (1946-54); and the Algerian War (1954-62). The net result of these symposia was the identification of six core functions of airpower in IW: (1) mobility, (2) close air support (CAS), (3) reconnaissance, (4) air interdiction, (5) psychological warfare, and (6) air superiority.[17]

These works do not represent thinking about the strategic effects of airpower as much as they do a recounting of available, and in some cases antique aircraft capabilities applied to IW. The next logical step for the USAF would have been to incorporate the

[16] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 79-84.

[17] A.H. Peterson, G.C Reinhardt, and E.E. Conger, "Symposium on the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: A Brief Summary of Viewpoints." RM-3867-PR, (March 1964), 3-11.

pertinent lessons from history and contemporary experience into service doctrine, if only to formalize the functions of airpower in IW. Yet only one effort was made to do so, which was inclusion of a section on insurgency in the *United States Air Force Basic Doctrine* dated 14 August 1964. The bulk of airpower doctrine, however, remained focused on the strategic bombardment mission.[18] If the USAF acknowledged the irregular conflict in Southeast Asia it did not do so in its doctrine—how it expected to fight war. A ready source of lessons learned from the use of airpower in IW was available to the USAF at the time. A more progressive approach to doctrine, on the eve of commitment of forces to Vietnam, would have incorporated the experiences documented by the US Marine Corps a quarter-century before.

Doctrine

Though irregular warfare has not historically figured prominently in airpower doctrine it played a foundational role in doctrine of the US Marine Corps. Based on 134 years of experience conducting "wars of an altogether different kind,"[19] the Corps codified its principles in the *Small Wars Manual* of 1940.[20] It further expounded on the political nature of strategy in such conflict, as well as elaborated on methods of pacification, disarmament of the population, armed native organizations, establishment and administration of military government, the supervision of elections, and, in the final section, "withdrawal."

The twenty-one pages that comprise Chapter IX, "Aviation," of the *Small Wars Manual* describe several key concepts for guiding the employment of airpower, to include the following: centralized control of aviation assets by the senior aviator; guidelines for the establishment of an efficient and priority-driven logistics and resupply system by air transport; guidelines for casualty evacuation prioritization; guidelines for

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[18] William P. Head, PhD. "War from above the Clouds: B-52 Operations during the Second Indochina War and the Effects of the Air War on Theory and Doctrine," (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, July 2002), 17.

[19] U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual (Reprint of the 1940 Edition)*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1987): 2, 8.

[20] U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1. The manual defines "small wars" as "operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation."

coordination of reconnaissance and weapons delivery in advance of ground operations; and, due notice of the potential for non-combatant casualties when "hostile forces seek the shelter of occupied towns and villages."[21] If ever there was a foundational document upon which the USAF might have derived irregular warfare doctrine, the *Small Wars Manual* was it.

Despite several communist-backed insurgencies occupying the attention of military forces around the world in the 1950s, American military doctrine increasingly focused on the future nuclear battlefield—for obvious reasons. But this paucity of official thought led airpower historian Dennis Drew to conclude that the USAF historically "has not accounted for the realities of insurgent conflict in its theory of airpower."[22] By 1967, however, the USAF's prolonged (and perhaps perceived as open-ended) involvement in Southeast Asia had begun to make a more serious impact on the service's official doctrine. In March of that year, Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 2-5, *Tactical Air Operations Special Air Warfare* was published. The USAF had been engaged in Southeast Asia for five years before its *tactical-level* doctrine was available.

AFMAN 2-5 emphasized military and non-military unity of effort, reduction of collateral damage, the importance of inter-agency country teams, recognition of the population as the center of gravity, and the necessity of all efforts being directed by a unified strategy.[23] Despite its continued relevance, a shift away from the term *special air warfare* in favor of *special operations* appeared in the official basic doctrine in 1971.[24] This shift signals that the USAF did not view irregular warfare as distinct mode of warfare relevant to the entire force, but rather a subset mission that was the responsibility of a small number of specialized forces. One can conclude from this change in language that the USAF had mentally, if not entirely physically, withdrawn from Southeast Asia in frustration.

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[21] U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 9-15, "Control and command;" 9-20, "Tactical reconnaissance;" 9-32, "General considerations;" and 9-30, "Attacks on towns."

[22] Dennis M. Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge: A Short Journey to Confusion."" *The Journal of Military History* 62, No. 4 (October, 1998): 809.

[23] Head, "War from above the Clouds," 33.

[24] Head, "War from above the Clouds," 61.

Airpower theory—particularly that aimed at the achievement of strategic effects—re-emerged from the doldrums of Vietnam in the form of a call for independent action to achieve rapid, decisive victory following the USAF's devastating performance against the Iraqi military in 1991. The theorist behind the air campaign, Colonel John Warden, later articulated his theory of *strategic warfare*, which advocated approaching one's enemy as an integral system rather than simply attacking their armed forces.[25] The underlying premise of the theory was that by prioritizing appropriately and simultaneously targeting subsystems within the appropriate rings, one could achieve a range of effects from annihilation to the induction of internal collapse to coercive pressure.[26]

The utility and *allure* of the notion that airpower can inflict strategic paralysis, brought on by Warden's theories and the Air Force experience in Desert Storm, has had a number of effects. The effects include entrenching the idea of airpower inflicting strategic paralysis as a cornerstone of USAF doctrine and capability. In addition, there has been the propensity to view warfare as enemy-focused and target-centric. Despite Warden's assurance that a "Maoist" guerrilla organization is "well described by the five rings," the theory's applicability to irregular warfare leaves much to be desired.[27] Nevertheless, one year following Desert Storm, and despite the years of experience and sacrifice in Vietnam and later counterinsurgencies in Latin America, the entirety of irregular warfare was removed from the USAF's basic doctrine during the general officer review process in 1992.[28]

Current Doctrine and…Theory?

It is too early to tell if the cycle of Air Force doctrine development for irregular warfare is destined to repeat itself with the publishing of AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, in 2007. There have been a number of positive developments that have occurred as a result of the Air Force re-thinking and re-publishing irregular warfare doctrine for

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[25] John A.Warden, III. "The Enemy as a System." *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 1995), ""

[26] Warden, "The Enemy as a System."

[27] Warden, "The Enemy as a System." For a deeper analysis, see Anthony Carr, "America's Conditional Advantage: Airpower, Counterinsurgency, and the Theory of John Warden." Master's Thesis. School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2009.

[28] Drew, "U.S. Airpower Theory," 831.

airmen.[29] Unfortunately, the majority of opinions, theories, and to a certain extent, doctrine approach irregular warfare from the perspective of targeting the enemy and influencing enemy leadership, much in line with traditional airpower thought . Instead of building on a fundamental understanding of irregular warfare and strategy, the overwhelming tendency is to apply existing airpower capabilities—just as has been done throughout airpower's short history—and to view the contributions of airpower in terms of the functions it has historically provided.

One such example, though a minority opinion, is the return of the concept of "air policing." Airpower historian Dr. Phillip Meilinger's modern update offers up an "air-centric joint COIN model" built on the successful results achieved through Operations NORTHERN and SOUTHERN WATCH (1991-2003), Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), and Iraq (2003).[30] The fact that none of those conflicts could be classified as an insurgency makes it fairly obvious Dr. Meilinger is making prescriptions without accounting for the unique nature of IW. Beneath ideas like air policing is the tendency to view airpower's kinetic effects as a substitute for ground troops. Dr. Meilinger is not alone in this regard.

A more thoroughly researched but also mistaken effort is Major General Charles Dunlap's manifesto on the lack of airpower discussion in the 2006 US Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. Unfortunately, his analysis provides perhaps the most glaring example of the type of airpower thought, often described as "airmindedness," that is counterproductive to the development of strategy in irregular warfare. Dunlap quickly identifies all the advantages modern airpower—which he claims are lacking in all the case studies on which FM 3-24 was built—as relevant to counterinsurgency. He also points to the inherent disadvantages of operating large numbers of ground forces in an

[29] See Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 1 August 2007. Positive developments include debating the fundamental purposes for the employment of airpower and attempting to define airpower's unique role in irregular warfare through academic institution and publications. Ultimately such efforts serve to advance doctrine and thought and AFDD 2-3 provides grist for such debates.
[30] Phillip S. Meilinger, "Counterinsurgency from Above." *Air Force Magazine*, (July 2008), 39.

occupied territory, but largely fails to address the fundamentally different challenges irregular warfare poses in contrast to traditional warfare that require such forces.[31]

Dunlap argues that ground forces have simply bowed to the heroic tradition of close-combat ground fighting in conceiving how to defeat an insurgency. He further asserts that the manual's authors have conflated numbers of troops with the effects one seeks from large military forces, largely because such troops represent little more than firepower.[32] To Dunlap, airpower is a substitute for ground forces, and no matter what success the "Surge" of 2007-2008 achieves in Iraq its approach is fundamentally flawed.[33] Dunlap concludes with a reasonable plea for the development of joint doctrine for COIN.

As for the institutional view, the USAF's first attempt at writing doctrine for irregular warfare since it disappeared in 1971, Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare* is an improvement by the very fact that it exists at all.[34] Published in August, 2007, AFDD 2-3 brought the discussion of air, space, and cyberspace back to irregular warfare. AFDD 2-3 is remarkable in terms of how little it specifically refers to airmen and the application of airpower. Though the education in IW is both relevant and necessary, one expects that a document that opens with words from the Air Force Chief of Staff that "Irregular warfare is sufficiently different from traditional conflict to warrant a separate keystone doctrine document" would deliver more than repackaged Air Force core competencies.[35] In substance, AFDD 2-3 serves as a comprehensive primer for airmen on the general differences between IW and its traditional counterpart leading to a function-based approach for the employment of airpower. Such an approach to

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[31] Maj Gen Charles J. Dunlap, Jr. "Shortchanging the Joint Fight? An Airman's Assessment of FM 3-24 and the Case for Developing Truly Joint COIN Doctrine."(Air University Monograph, 2008), 15-16.
[32] Dunlap, "Shortchanging the Joint Fight?" 9.
[33] Dunlap, "Shortchanging the Joint Fight?" 63.
[34] Prior to the publishing of AFDD 2-3, USAF doctrine on IW had two separate and distinct doctrinal strands. The first was AFDD 2.3, Military Operations Other Than War, which was published in 5 October 1996 and contained a hodge-podge of missions not addressed elsewhere in doctrine. The second strand was AFDD 2-7.1, *Foreign Internal Defense*, published 2 February 1998 and was a subset of special operations doctrine (AFDD 2-7). AFDD 2-7.1 replaced AFDD 36, *Foreign Internal Defense*, which was published on 6 January 1995. The new AFDD 2-7.1 followed the standing up of a specialized unit to conduct foreign internal defense aviation support missions, the 6th Special Operations Squadron, in April 1994.
[35] AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, ii.

employment of airpower, however, does little to differentiate IW from traditional warfare.

The Limits of Functionality

This study has explored the differences in the character of IW, described a working theory, and examined its relationship to strategy. Having briefly reviewed the history of airpower and airpower doctrine for IW, what remains is to merge theory and history together into a more generalized airpower theory for IW. If IW is indeed a distinctly different form of warfare from that which shaped the larger body of airpower theory and doctrine, then there should be qualitative differences in the utility of airpower. The aim of this next section is to identify and articulate those differences.

The overwhelming trend for airmen is to summarize airpower's contributions to previous irregular conflicts and classify them by capability or function. Airmen cannot largely help but think in terms of functionality, as the USAF's entire conceptual foundation for both procuring aircraft and equipment and employing the force are based on functional descriptions.[36] This approach imposes limitations on airmen as they are called upon to conceptualize means by which to link the advantages of the air and space medium to the strategic ends of a conflict. Furthermore, as the USAF's foundational doctrine document points out, functions are supposed to serve as building blocks, not as ends in themselves.[37] The discussion of linkages between effects, strategy, and political outcomes is largely missing from the airpower and IW literature.[38]

One example of how the effects generated by airpower are not tied to strategy and political outcome is mobility. Mobility is often touted as a critical component of IW, but what does mobility do in terms of achieving strategic objectives? Mobility, at its most

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[36] For example, the USAF operational functions: Strategic Attack, Counterair, Counterspace, Counterland, Countersea, Information Operations, Combat Support, Command & Control, Airlift, Air Refueling, Spacelift, Special Operations, Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance, Combat Search & Rescue, Navigation & Positioning, Weather Services. See AFDD 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 17 November 2003, 39.

[37] AFDD 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 17 November 2003, 38. "Operational functions are tied to achieving specific effects. Effects are outcomes, events, or consequences resulting from specific actions; effects should contribute directly to desired military and political outcomes. This requires commanders and planners to explicitly and comprehensively link, to the greatest extent possible, each tactical action to strategic and operational objectives."

[38] One notable exception is Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 425-427. Corum and Johnson conclude that it is essential for airpower to be integrated into strategy in "small wars."

basic conceptual level is simply "moving things around." AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare,* hints at some potential indirect effects, such as extending the reach of the partner nation government into ungoverned spaces, but largely remains focused on the functional description.[39] Likewise, the discussion of the ISR function in AFDD 2-3 makes mention of the possibility that the presence of airborne ISR is likely to have significant effects on an irregular enemy, such as instilling fear and inducing him to take measures to avoid detection.[40] While not the primary function of ISR, the effect is also not unique to ISR assets. The ability to achieve indirect effects on the enemy, host population, and government forces through the presence of airpower is given only a surface-level treatment within the doctrine.

There is good reason for this gap in the doctrinal discussion. It is extremely difficult to link the effects required to prevail in IW, as described in the previous chapter, to individual instruments of power. Irregular warfare largely denies airpower experts the systematic, tangible understanding of targets and effects that have characterized air campaigns from World War II to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Destruction means less in IW than non-kinetic effects when the objective of the conflict is met—a stable government, capable of fending for itself. The relationship between airpower and these effects is more often indirect, non-linear, and therefore difficult to predict.

Even when kinetic airpower is required, the nature of the irregular enemy makes targeting problematic. The types of targets are physically different from those found in traditional warfare, more often consisting of people than things. Though the enemy may use a facility or vehicle for a traditionally military function, such as a command center or a "troop" transport, they will largely remain undistinguishable and perhaps interspersed with those of the non-combatant population. The implications for airpower are that intelligence and targeting must shift from static signature to dynamic, behavior-based identification. For example, airborne surveillance may detect a person, perhaps with a weapon, suspected as being the enemy. Without actually witnessing a hostile action, such as threatening civilians, shooting at friendly forces, or setting an ambush, he can only be

[39] AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 40.
[40] AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 32.

labeled a potential enemy. He is an unknown, requiring an alternate system or intelligence source to verify—or a dedicated asset to observe that individual *over time* until his *behavior* can be classified as hostile.

Therefore persistence and guaranteed availability—in doctrinal terms, direct support—may be the most desirable effects generated by airpower in irregular warfare. This poses a fundamental challenge to the Air Force's doctrinal tenet of centralized control, decentralized execution: the inherent flexibility of airpower acts directly counter to a supported commander's ability to rely on the continuous effects it generates. The optimal use of the limited resources generating such effects may best be delegated down the chain of command to the level possessing the requisite situational awareness to best use them.

During support missions such as CAS, airpower's inherent flexibility introduces an element of unpredictability to the supported ground commander's planning effort. Centrally controlled airpower requires ground commanders to make requests to the central authority, which in turn ranks those requests in accordance with a joint force commander's guidance for prioritization. The effect on the requesting unit is that unless its mission is a top theater priority, it must continue planning its operations without guarantee of what degree of support it will receive, or for how long. Thus the tendency for the ground force—particular a small force tasked with conducting operations on the periphery of a larger conflict—is to minimize the unit's reliance on a capability that cannot be guaranteed as available. It increases the risk of mission failure to plan for a capability that can be re-tasked to support a higher priority at the last moment, or even during the mission. Furthermore, the land component's doctrine of combined arms warfare means that, in the absence of air support, the organic support provided by armor, artillery, and attack aviation will serve to make up for the shortfall. For a ground commander, it may make sense to use airpower when it is available, but to build his plans so that they do not fail without it.

Flexibility of air assets is required in IW as ground units tend to be more dispersed, more lightly equipped and armed, less centrally controlled, and necessarily operate with reduced numbers of organic support assets, such as artillery, armor, and aviation. The US may also be limited in assets to what the supported host nation force has

available. Airpower provides a natural substitute for numbers of forces, providing intelligence, kinetic, and non-kinetic effects when required. But the unpredictability of these effects, particularly for units that are not the top priority of effort, creates severe limitations that a lightly-equipped force will have difficulty overcoming. Flexibility, often touted as airpower's greatest attribute, can also function as its most frustrating attribute to ground commanders waging IW.

One constraint on flexibility is a lack of sufficient numbers of aircraft. Given that American policymakers do not see irregular conflicts as threatening national survival, developing and sustaining military capabilities for such conflicts more often only occurs once forces are engaged. Air forces in particular do not widely equip for irregular warfare because such capabilities are not always applicable to higher-intensity conflicts that do threaten the survival or core interests of the state. Thus, irregular warfare is many times waged from the air with technological systems designed for fighting a very different type of enemy, and a nation's ability to rapidly adapt its organization, technology, and doctrine plays a significant part in whether or not it succeeds.[41] As the conflict persists, the tendency for airmen is to modify the aircraft and technological systems to remedy what are viewed as tactical deficiencies.

As the preceding section argued, air forces tend to drastically reduce or eliminate adaptations and capabilities for IW once perceived need for them has passed. When IW capabilities are eliminated, doctrine atrophies. Thus, there has been an inevitable phase of rediscovery that accompanies irregular warfare. The implication for airmen is that the current challenges of IW will be met, yet again, by adaptation of technological systems designed for a vastly different mission set.

Yet, tactical and technological adaptations yield only marginal improvements in effectiveness. In a conflict that revolves around localized political power and the support of a population as centers of gravity, the battlefield is as much mental and perceptual as it is physical. The political effects enabled by airpower are therefore indirect and difficult to

[41] Organizational adaptation, as a requirement for success in IW, is the central theme of John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

quantify; they require a focus on the political objectives in order to reveal them.[42] Rather than thinking about functions or platforms, airmen should think instead about airpower's relationship to the concept of *influence* in irregular warfare. Influence, for the purpose of this discussion, is the product of effects *acting over time*.[43] All of airpower's effects contribute in one form or another to bolster or diminish a supported government's power and legitimacy in the eyes of its governed populace. Those same effects attrite, diminish, or pressure the operations of the non-state forces. The difficulty for the air strategist lies in linking airpower's effects to that influence.

Extending the influence of the central government spatially and deepening the perception of legitimacy within the governed populace are effects that airpower can generate. Time plays a significant role in both. If the counterinsurgent's efforts pause, stop, or are inconsistently applied, the insurgent still has room to operate. The state's absence affords the insurgent the opportunity to illustrate to the population that the protection afforded by the state is inevitably temporary. Therefore, any collaboration with the state becomes hazardous for a local population. Indeed, the insurgency most likely developed partly as a result of inconsistent or non-existent state presence. To the degree airpower bolsters the state's presence and therefore contests the insurgent's maneuvering space, airpower's presence must also be consistent.

Placing pressure on an insurgent or non-state actor group through surveillance and selective kinetic targeting is another indirect effect of airpower. While the direct results of disrupting the insurgent organization through kinetic strikes, the simple presence of the air threat or surveillance alters the insurgency's modes of operation.[44] The mere presence of airpower may drive an insurgency deeper underground or to temporarily disperse. For

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[42] Despite the USJFCOM commander's initiative to move joint operations away from the terminology of "effects," there simply is no better way to discuss the application of airpower to discrete operational strategic objectives in war. See James N. Mattis, "USJFCOM Commander's Guidance for Effects-based Operations," *Parameters* 38, no. 3, (Autumn 2008), 18-25.

[43] For example, if airpower provides one of the often-touted functions that enables IW, such as mobility, there is a qualitative difference between moving personnel back and forth when aircraft are available to support a movement of such priority, and the establishment of a dedicated, prioritized air lines-of-communication that links a regional or central government with an outlying province. Making such use of air routine and predictable demonstrates government competence and a *future* commitment to the people and not just a reaction to the enemy.

[44] Alan Vick, et al, *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era: The Strategic Importance of USAF Advisory and Assistance Missions*, MG-509 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), 113.

example, in Iraq, insurgents associated the engine noise of AC-130 gunships with the effects those platforms generated at night. An air strategist thinking about influencing insurgents could mix a force of conventional C-130s with AC-130s and sustain the same effect over time. The pressure on insurgents to constantly account for the influence of airpower can induce friction into their operations, among other secondary and tertiary effects.

From the preceding discussion three key conceptual differences between IW and traditional airpower thought emerge. It is essential to emphasize that these differences may be more of a matter of degree rather than type. Nevertheless, airpower in IW is characterized by: (1) a greater subordination to political restraints; (2) a higher sensitivity to the degree of centralization of control; and (3) the primacy of indirect effects, better characterized as *influence.* If airpower in irregular warfare requires a fundamentally different approach than that of traditional airpower thought, then one should be able to identify these concepts operating in historical case examples. The American experience in Southeast Asia from 1954-1973 provides the necessary substance with which to evaluate these propositions.

The Case Studies

The written history of the Vietnam War does not always provide clear answers to basic questions. For example, who was really at war? The US intervened on behalf of South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, which were threatened by the communist regime in North Vietnam. But the overriding concern of the American policymakers was the prevention of the spread of communism. Though the majority of combat occurred in South Vietnam and Laos against insurgents, the overarching concern was the potential for Chinese or Soviet intervention and the subsequent escalation they believed would result. This larger struggle heavily influenced the way America fought in Vietnam.

For the purposes of this study, American involvement in the conflict began with the conclusion of the Geneva conference of 1954.[45] The Vietnam case study, though

[45] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990.* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991), 43-45. Even though the French had fought to hold their colony since 1946, America successfully abstained from direct intervention on their behalf. Once Vietnam was split in two, disappointed Viet Minh nationalists steeled

complex, allows examination of the application of airpower in different irregular warfare situations under multiple sets of political restraints and with strategic variation over time. By the time the US withdrew its personnel from the embassy in Saigon in 1975, men on both sides had fought and died in Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam. Thailand was threatened as the final "domino" in the region and served both as staging base for American airpower and a valuable ally in largely secret campaign to push back the Viet Minh in Laos. The strategic approach to defeating communist expansion changed distinctly as American policymakers changed their views and levels of commitments to the conflict. For this reason, the following case studies are divided temporally instead of nationally or geographically.

The first time period begins with the Viet Minh victory over the French in May 1954 and ends with the US military and civilian advisors putting together a comprehensive counterinsurgency plan for the government of South Vietnam in 1961. The second case picks up from this point, with the effort to implement previously successful counterinsurgency principles through a robust advisory mission and ends with the decision to escalate the war by deploying massive numbers of conventional military forces in 1965. The third case analyzes the conflict from 1965 to 1968, a period characterized primarily by large-scale conventional military battles and attempts to coerce North Vietnam using airpower. The final phase of the war, 1968 through the withdrawal of the last American combat advisors in 1973, is not covered in detail. The reason this phase is not covered is that even though the American strategic approach changed as withdrawal became imminent,[46] the nature of airpower's contribution to the conflict did not. Though the platforms and technology improved, the employment or airpower remained qualitatively constant, even if the quantity increased.

In each case, the discussion of airpower is placed within the political and strategic context of the time period. No attempt is made to provide a comprehensive list or catalogue of every single type of air mission flown. That project is better left to future

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their resolve for a long struggle for unification. At the same time, the US began to study possible unconventional warfare and covert actions likely to keep South Vietnam from "going communist."

[46] President Johnson's public announcement that he would not seek re-election and refusal to grant General Westmoreland's request for an additional 200,000 combat troops in 1968 are largely acknowledged as the key indicators of the turning point in American political will.

historians. Instead, this study offers selected uses of the air instrument that exhibit the greatest relevance to theoretical underpinnings of irregular warfare—as described in Chapter 1—of the conflict. Thus, enabling missions like air superiority and search-and-rescue are largely left unexamined. These supporting missions, though crucial, do not aid our understanding of the distinct challenges of employing airpower in IW to influence the insurgents and the population.

Chapter 3

The Early Years: 1954-1961

> *The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer their country. We are convinced that the Allied nations, which at Teheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Viet-Nam...*
>
> *A people who have courageously opposed French domination for more than eighty years, a people who have fought side by side with the Allies against the fascists during these last years, such a people must be free and independent..*
>
> *For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet-Nam has the right to be a free and independent country—and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty.*
>
> —Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam
> September 2, 1945

Introduction: Getting Involved

Understanding America's first and deepening involvement in Vietnam begins after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the subsequent peace agreement signed in Geneva. In the wake of World War II France was economically weak. This weakness led many in French government to conclude it was vital to regain their hold over their colonies and their natural resources. Such colonies and territories included Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia and according to the wisdom of the time, letting one gain its independence—such as Indochina—would threaten to destabilize the others.[1] As one historian put it, "[t]o France, the re-conquest of Vietnam *constituted* reconstruction, and

[1] Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 22.

the United States raised no objection despite some discomfort."[2] The Truman Administration actually worried about a weakened France falling into the "Soviet orbit," and consciously chose to support France's re-occupation of its former colony.

The communist invasion of the Republic of Korea in June 1950 dramatically illustrated the dangers of communist expansion to President Truman. Within a week, American C-47s arrived in Saigon and were handed over to the French. The US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG)-Indochina was established in Saigon in August for the purposes of responding to French requests for support countering immediate threats and improving French military capabilities. A distant third purpose for the MAAG was developing Vietnamese indigenous forces.[3] By the beginning of 1953, the United States was underwriting one-third of the cost of French military operations.[4]

The overarching political backdrop—according to the popular view at the time—was a global communist insurgent threat posed by a "unified communist apparatus" to "advance its cause without risking either nuclear or conventional war."[5] Within this context every communist uprising in the form of guerrilla warfare in the Third World was likely to be viewed as part of a larger, more centralized and Soviet-led communist expansion.[6]

The real aim of Ho Chi Minh's quest, however, was an independent Vietnam, unified under socialism.[7] General Vo Ngyuen Giap's defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu on May 7, 1954 led directly to the Geneva peace accords, although this agreement was not signed by either the US or South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the Geneva Accords partitioned French Indochina into the two Vietnams, severed at the 17th parallel, as well as Laos and Cambodia (see Appendix A for a map of the former Indochina).[8] More importantly, the hard-fought victory over the French and the concessions gained through

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[2] Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 22. Emphasis original.
[3] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 6-7.
[4] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 11.
[5] Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance 1950 to the Present.* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1977), 66.
[6] Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, 66.
[7] Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 7-8.
[8] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63." Unpublished Report (May 1964), 6.

the Geneva Accords further emboldened Ho, who had first spoken publicly of a Vietnam free from imperial rule following the Japanese surrender in September 1945.[9]

In South Vietnam, the absence of exiled emperor Bao Dai led cabinet member Ngo Dinh Diem to emerge first as the head of the cabinet and subsequently as the Premier of the South Vietnamese government in 1954.[10] Diem's tenure as South Vietnam's leader was met almost immediately by unrest among the population. Though there are claims the Hanoi regime instigated and directed the violence in the South, subsequent analysis and scholarly work has revealed that the insurgency was started first by disaffected citizens under the Diem government, and was only later aided by North Vietnamese communists.[11]

Anti-Diem activity steadily rose in the South to a level deemed untenable by the American mission there in 1959. By May 30, 1960 US Special Forces had arrived for the purpose of training the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).[12] The gradual expansion of this effort, and the supervision such forces required, led to the establishment of the American-run Saigon Military Mission. This mission represented the first official—though not officially acknowledged— US shift from only supporting the French to direct support of South Vietnamese counterinsurgency efforts.[13]

The geopolitical anchor for the US in the region, as a bulwark against the spread of communism, was the Kingdom of Thailand. The centrality of Thailand to American grand strategic thought and calculations spurred the creation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the signature of the bilateral Manila Pact between Washington and Bangkok in 1954, which effectively united the two nations against the spread of communism. The Pact also specifically rejected any role for the communist

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[9] In a bit of historical irony Ho quoted from the American Declaration of Independence. Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 10-11.

[10] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 6.

[11] United States Department of Defense. *The Pentagon Papers; The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Gravel Edition*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), Volume 1, Chapter 5, ""Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960."" Section 1, 242-269.

[12] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 6.

[13] Col Edward Lansdale, "Lansdale Team's Report on Covert Saigon Mission in 1954 and 1955," ""in *The Pentagon Papers.* Volume 1, Document 95, 573-83.

party in Laotian government, especially the communist Pathet Lao, and therefore effectively eliminated any future option of political compromise with them.[14]

Though neighboring Laos has also been the scene of numerous French-Viet Minh clashes, the Geneva Agreements were also supposed to force the abandonment of Laos as a contested region. For its part, the Laotian delegation to the conference proclaimed the government of Laos would not permit its territory to be used "in the furtherance of a policy of aggression,"[15] a proclamation that would prove both unenforceable and uniformly disregarded by all parties. All of these factors combined to create an environment of distinct restraints as to what the US government could do in an effort to rein in what it saw as the inevitable spread of communism to the southeast coastlines of Asia, the archipelagos of the South China Sea, and the Pacific region beyond.

Political Restraints

The Geneva Agreement of 1954 specified the details for a regional cease-fire, the partition of Vietnam into two halves separated by a demilitarized zone, and instructions for the withdrawal and regrouping of forces to their respective sides. It further prohibited the import of military personnel, weapons, and munitions into, or the establishment of new bases in, any part of Indochina. It was to be enforced by an international commission composed of mobile monitoring teams made up of representatives from India, Canada, and Poland.[16]

Despite the fact that neither the United States nor the South Vietnamese delegations to the Geneva conference actually signed the accords, both felt pressure to pay a modicum of lip service to them to maintain the public stance of keeping Indochina free from conflict. The reality, however, was that US advisors had begun firming up plans for mounting an unconventional warfare campaign while French forces were still

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[14] Timothy N. Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam, U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government 1955-1975.* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 129.
[15] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers*, Volume 1, Chapter 5, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960." Section 2, 270-282.
[16] "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam, July 20, 1954." http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/genevacc.htm, (accessed 17 April 2010).

under siege at Dien Bien Phu.[17] Nevertheless, the outcome of the Geneva Accords combined with the notion of global communist expansion—reinforced by the recent conflict in Korea—to distinctly shape how the battle between the free and democratic world, led by the United States, and communism would be fought.

Strategy

Having identified the chief political restraints, this next section turns to the ways and means employed by US personnel to slow the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The cornerstone of the American effort was the Saigon Military Mission, headed by USAF Colonel Edward Lansdale. Lansdale's team was specifically tasked to conduct paramilitary operations and "political-psychological warfare."[18] As the events of 1954 unfolded, Lansdale's team members scrambled to put together small units of qualified military personnel to organize resistance to the communist regime tightening its grip on the North Vietnamese population centers as French forces withdrew.

Lansdale's Mission, under the guise of providing refugee transport and assistance and employing a civilian airline as cover, was able to establish a small, American-led cell in North Vietnam before the Viet Minh were able to close off access to the country. Its mission was to organize and train a paramilitary force to carry out subversion and sabotage against the regime in Hanoi.[19] The team's operations in the Hanoi region were short-lived, however, as the Viet Minh set about tightening control over the territory of North Vietnam with ruthless efficiency. As the last of the French left North Vietnam in October 1954, so did the members of Lansdale's team. Their last actions included "contaminating the oil supply of the bus company for a gradual wreckage of engines in the buses…taking the first actions for delayed sabotage of the railroad…and in writing detailed notes of potential targets for future paramilitary operations."[20] Their experience indicated that subversive operations against the regime in North Vietnam were hazardous

[17] Col Edward Lansdale, "Lansdale Team's Report."
[18] Col Edward Lansdale, "Lansdale Team's Report".
[19] Col Edward Lansdale, "Lansdale Team's Report".
[20] Col Edward Lansdale, "Lansdale Team's Report". The team elected to forego active sabotage on the Hanoi power plant, water facilities, harbor, and bridge in an effort to adhere to the Geneva provisions.

and unlikely to succeed, and thus future efforts would have to be coordinated from and focused primarily on South Vietnam.

South Vietnam

As with Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, and Italy in 1948, the American political endstate in South Vietnam was "to establish a viable anti-communist regime in a country seen as threatened with absorption into the Soviet Bloc."[21] The central problem, in the region first termed "Free Vietnam" was that the departure of French colonial rule had left a vacuum of legitimate, popular, and most importantly, non-colonial Vietnamese leadership. The territory was beset by historical regional issues and tensions which resurfaced as well. Furthermore, the Geneva agreements of 1954 had not really established a state below the 17th parallel. South Vietnam was a state in name only and a provisional one at that. The border established in 1954 was supposed to last only until elections for reunifications were to occur in 1956.[22]

To say the situation in South Vietnam during the Diem years was complex is a tremendous understatement. As for a unified strategy for South Vietnam, an examination of historical documents indicates either one did not exist or has not surfaced yet. What passes for strategic objectives, however, can be intuited from the actions of the Saigon Military Mission, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the controversy surrounding Diem. Thomas Ahern's recently declassified accounting of the CIA's records of this period provides the full story, but for the purposes of this study two main foci suffice: the early attempts at civic action in central South Vietnam, and the later efforts to shape the South Vietnamese army for what was believed to be its primary challenge in the near future: repelling a large-scale communist invasion from the north.[23]

Premier Diem vehemently repudiated CIA urgings to establish and grow a political base in an effort to counter mounting disaffection in the South Vietnamese countryside—effectively most of the country, as Diem's central government confined itself largely to Saigon. He did agree, however, to small scale efforts labeled

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[21] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 1, Chapter 5, ""Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960"."Section 2, 270-282.

[22] Thomas L. Ahern, Jr. *CIA and the House of Ngo: Covert Action in South Vietnam, 1954-1963.* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2000): 13. Available online at www.cia.gov/foia.

[23] Ahern, *CIA and the House of Ngo*, 13.

"pacification" as early as 1955 by Colonel Lansdale, who made such recommendations based on his successful use of them during the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines just a few years prior.[24] Lansdale saw the need to extend the Diem government's reach out beyond the capital city's borders if for no other reason than to contest what was wide-open political space for the communist ideology perpetuated by the pockets of stay-behind cadres ordered to remain in place by the Viet Minh prior to the Geneva cease-fire.[25]

Lansdale was able to get Diem to order the army to make excursions into the countryside under the guise of civic action programs, which met with initial but ultimately temporary success. In one example, Diem and an element from his army traveled to the central province of Binh Dinh, where Viet Minh were actively gaining support and influence. Lansdale and Diem both agreed on the need to keep American profile to a minimum, for fear of the appearance of American occupation. Diem was met with surprised and enthusiastic support, and the army, exercising "discipline and good will," was greeted with information and assistance in locating local Viet Minh arms caches.[26] Lansdale's counter-Huk Rebellion model of extending government influence into under-governed and politically-contested regions appeared a reasonable approach to countering the spread of Viet Minh influence in South Vietnam.

The ultimate failure of the civic action method of "pacification," however, came as the army and Diem made appearances, received warm welcomes and support, and then disappeared. No follow-on efforts were made to establish a permanent state government presence in the region. The largely transitory forays into the countryside represent a pattern that would be repeated by Diem, his army, and much later, the US Army.

Instead of focusing on internal security, Diem's military policy was to organize the ARVN to repel a large-scale conventional invasion. The chief of the Military Advisory and Assistance Group, Lt. Gen. Samuel T. Williams, had been advising Diem

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[24] For details see Edward Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 216-217.
[25] Ahern, *CIA and the House of Ngo*, 64.
[26] Ahern, *CIA and the House of Ngo*, 64.

to do so since his arrival in October 1955.[27] This is one of many examples of disjointed efforts precluding an integrated strategy by what was a very small group of US government representatives at the time. Needless to say, the Viet Minh and the disaffected in the South continued to make gains and grow in numbers.

Despite Diem's diminishing political viability and the fact that communist mobile guerrilla warfare had begun during the Tet holiday of 1960, the American effort present in South Vietnam at the time—the country team composed of the CIA, State Department, MAAG, and others—took until the end of 1960 to overcome their respective agency biases and implement a coordinated, Mission-wide counterinsurgency plan.[28]

Laos

In Laos, the burden fell largely on the CIA to prevent Viet Minh-backed Pathet Lao communist insurgents from strangling the Royal Lao Government (RLG). The approach adopted by the CIA was representative of its ideas about post-colonial society in general. Many senior CIA personnel believed that political and paramilitary efforts were necessary to preserve threatened anti-communist regimes.[29] Politically, the threatened government—traditionally composed of an elite class—must establish a link with those it governed by showing a genuine concern for the needs of the rural populace. Militarily, the objective was to develop small, mobile units capable of actively pursuing and contesting insurgents in communist-held territory as well as organizing a civil defense.[30]

Viet Minh support for communist initiatives within Laos dates back to the 1950 creation of the anti-colonial Pathet Lao ("Land of Laos") movement by Royal Lao Prince Souphanouvong—one of three opposition groups formed by the sons of King Sisavang Vong following his call for a return to French protectorate status in 1945.[31] During the early 1950s, the Pathet Lao opposed the nationalist government, but lacked the strength

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[27] Ahern, *CIA and the House of Ngo*, 145.
[28] Ahern, *CIA and the House of Ngo*, 145.
[29] Gregory Treverton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World* (New York: Basic, 1987), 37-43.
[30] Ahern, *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos, 1961-1973*, (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2000): 5. Available online at www.cia.gov/foia.
[31] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 6-7.

to contest government forces in open conflict without Vietnamese aid. Their resistance remained largely confined to the political sphere. By the end of 1956, the Lao government formally agreed the Pathet Lao had the same right to conduct political activities as any other political party. By 1958, the Pathet Lao and their supporters had won 13 of the 59 seats in the Lao National Assembly, tilting Laos uncomfortably towards the communist sphere.[32]

The American response to these developments was the establishment of the first US ambassador to Laos and the subsequent establishment of a MAAG. Special Forces (SF) soldiers from 7th Special Forces Group arrived in 1959 to strengthen the Royal Laotian Army and by extension, the central Lao government, at least in theory. The government changed hands twice in 1960 during coups: once due to what was seen as a return to a different form of imperialism under American influence, led by Captain Kong Le of the Royal Laotian Army, and a second time led by General Phoumi to overthrow Kong Le.[33]

The Pathet Lao continued to gain influence and support using the methods of Mao Zedong, working at the individual village level to subvert central government authority, which effectively stopped at the level of district governor. Pathet Lao cadres were able to observe individual village workings, choose a suitable agent, and then through support and, if necessary, coercion, get their chosen candidate elected as village chief. As one historian put it "Working persistently and shrewdly, the Pathet Lao, through propaganda, split loyalties, and calculated intimidation, gradually arrived at the point where their words carried more weight than those of the central government. In all this, their minute knowledge of village life served them well."[34]

The central government responded by sending elements of the Royal Lao Army into the northern parts of the country—traditional Pathet Lao strongholds—in advance of the 1960 district elections in order to "mop up" the Pathet Lao guerrilla elements and ensure an election free from undue communist influence. These operations included

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[32] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 15-17.
[33] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 20-22.
[34] Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: the Politics of Neutralization.* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964), 130-31.

punishment measures against individuals or villages that supported the resistance movements. On several occasions, entire villages were set ablaze to deter peasant support for the Pathet Lao.[35] The results of those elections were overwhelmingly pro-central government. Unfortunately, the margin of victory for pro-government candidates was so wide that allegations of election-rigging quickly surfaced, as did accounts of CIA agents "distribut[ing] bagfuls of money to village headmen."[36] Such allegations called into question the credibility of American democracy, and as the rhetoric of the opposition indicated, democracy was nothing more than a veil for American imperialism.

North Vietnam committed armed forces to Laos and escalated its aid to the Pathet Lao in 1960. By December, combinations of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army units controlled most of northeastern Laos and the area referred to as the panhandle (see Appendix B for a detailed map of Laos). To further complicate matters, the Soviet Union conducted airlift operations from North Vietnam in support of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army (NVA)[37] units in operating inside Laos.[38] By the end of 1960, both Soviet and American leaders were accusing each other of infringing upon Laotian sovereignty and violating the 1954 Geneva Accords' commitment to Laotian neutrality. What had been an American strategy of limited military advisory and training support under the guise of civilian assistance had failed to keep communist influence out of Laos and thus would require an alternate approach.

Airpower

US military activities in South Vietnam and Laos were limited to small numbers of advisory, support, and paramilitary personnel which pale beside the eventual commitment of US forces which began in 1965. As a result, airpower played a modest but essential supporting role to these activities. Military advisors and paramilitary operatives used the effects of airpower as leverage against the communist threat organizing in the north. The aim of this section is to qualitatively describe the efforts to

[35] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 132.
[36] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 132-133.
[37] Other works use the title People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) but refer to the same organization.
[38] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 1, Chapter 5, ""Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960."" Section 2, 242-269.

use airpower, by the USAF and CIA, in support of the larger strategic objectives of the American effort.

USAF

The Eisenhower Administration set the early precedent of supporting the French with military equipment but not combat troops to avoid deepening its direct involvement in the conflict.[39] Though the USAF had been involved in French Indochina since 1952, the bulk of the early support was in the form of French Air Force units flying American aircraft, using American-supplied munitions, and receiving American technical support.[40] Additionally, the first efforts at organizing a resistance to the communist regime of North Vietnam took the form of enabling covert movements of the Saigon Military Mission team of advisors as well as their equipment. These efforts, however, were characterized more by intratheater air movement, however, as the US political posture was that of aid to the French and not an overt military presence.[41] Additionally, VC-47 and SC-47 electronic surveillance platforms began collecting intelligence against Viet Minh units.[42]

Agency Airpower

What would become the CIA's primary air arm during the conflict, Civil Air Transport (CAT), started off as a legitimate air transport service in October 1946. CAT was founded by Flying Tiger General Claire Chennault who capitalized on his extensive post-war ties with Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek. From these ties he established CAT and he had a ready source of crews and manpower. Utilizing his personal network Chennault employed many of American Volunteer Group veterans with whom he was in contact.[43] CAT evolved from a normal airline into a support vehicle for American intelligence and military operations. The airline remained intimately involved in covert and clandestine operations in Vietnam until the eventual fall of Saigon in 1975. It was the only form of airpower listed in Colonel Lansdale's 1961 report on unconventional warfare resources and efforts ongoing in Southeast Asia. Lansdale

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[39] William M. Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974: Supporting the 'Secret War.'" Available at https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/docs/v43i3a07p.htm.
[40] Project CHECO Report "Part III, Political/Policy Influences OCT 61 – DEC 63," 6.
[41] Col Edward Lansdale, "Lansdale Team's Report.
[42] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 24-25; 32-33.
[43] Christopher Robbins. *Air America*, (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979): 41-46.

described CAT's extensive history in the region: "CAT has demonstrated its capability on numerous occasions to meet all types of contingency or long-term covert air requirements in support of U.S. objectives. During the past ten years, it has had some notable achievements, including support of the Chinese Nationalist withdrawal from the mainland, air drop support to the French at Dien Bien Phu, complete logistical and tactical air support for the Indonesian operation, air lifts of refugees from North Vietnam, more than 200 overflights of Mainland China and Tibet, and extensive air support in Laos during the current crisis."[44] Such a force could only be employed as a form of covered air as long as it was useful. Lansdale was quick to point out a number of valuable services that CAT provided: "air logistical support under commercial cover to most CIA and other U.S. Government agencies' requirements. CAT supports covert and clandestine air operations by providing trained and experienced personnel, procurement of supplies and equipment through overt commercial channels, and the maintenance of a fairly large inventory of transport and other type aircraft under both [Chinese] and U.S. registry."[45]

Ultimately CAT expanded to provide mobility for supplies and personnel in sufficient quantity and with sufficient predictability as to allow the establishment and sustainment of the irregular forces that were actively combating the communists in Laos. CAT accomplished its resupply mission using two means: (1) the adoption of the H-34 helicopter, and (2) the development of the short takeoff and landing (STOL) aircraft concept. Notably, the first helicopter used by CAT was in response to a CIA headquarters directive. The first two CAT helicopter pilots were sent to Japan to train on USAF H-19As. The first few newly-trained CAT crews and their underpowered H-19s proved woefully inadequate to the conditions and mission requirements in Laos. Within months,

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[44] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.* , Volume 2, pp. 643-649 "Excerpts from memorandum from Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, Pentagon expert on guerrilla warfare, to Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, President Kennedy's military adviser, on 'Resources for Unconventional Warfare, SE. Asia,' undated but apparently from July, 1961."

[45] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.* Volume 2, pp. 643-649 "Excerpts from memorandum from Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, Pentagon expert on guerrilla warfare, to Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, President Kennedy's military adviser, on 'Resources for Unconventional Warfare, SE. Asia,' undated but apparently from July, 1961."

CAT had hired newly-resigned US Marine Corps (USMC) helicopter pilots and the CIA was able to obtain a small fleet of H-34s through transfer from the USMC inventory.[46]

Air America, a CAT subsidiary created to provide focus for the burgeoning effort in Indochina, obtained Helio Courier STOL aircraft for use in Laos in 1959. These aircraft were purchased after a USAF-detailee to the CIA Air Branch, Major Harry Aderholt, had advocated for the capability. Aderholt not only oversaw the development of the concept, but also supervised modifications to the aircraft itself to overcome weaknesses that hindered operations from remote, improvised landing locations such as improvements to the nosewheel gear and rudder to prevent jamming by rocks.[47] This capability would prove central to the ability to command and coordinate the efforts of disparate irregular paramilitary forces as the conflict intensified during the coming years.

Analysis and Conclusions

This period of the conflict is defined by the predominately political nature of the effort to thwart communist influence in South Vietnam. The insurgency from 1954 to 1961 was doubtless under the control and direction of the communist party leadership in the north but was relatively small and still disorganized. Had Diem taken positive steps early on, he may have been able to at least slow its rate of growth. Though no one in the US Mission in Saigon believed the North Vietnamese would be dissuaded from attempting to unify the country, their recommendations for improving government functioning and administration out into the countryside were sound, and indeed may have undercut some of the insurgency's momentum if implemented as envisioned.

US airpower, in the form of tactical airlift, had supported the desperate French attempt to hold Indochina until their defeat in 1954. Though the US was not a signatory, its adherence to the Geneva Agreement generated significant restraints as to the acceptable signature of military efforts. Geneva set a threshold—one that specifically prohibited military forces and equipment from being employed within Laos. This condition served to definitively shape the nature of the conflict in Laos as one waged by

[46] Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos."
[47] Warren Trest, *Air Commando One: Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Air Wars* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 104-107.

paramilitary and irregular forces. Military support to the conflict would have to be carried out under the guise of civilian advisory and assistance efforts.

The desired strategic endstate until 1961 was to simply prevent communist incursion in Laos and aid the South Vietnamese central government in fending for itself. Individual efforts of military advisory groups and the CIA were uncoordinated but this was to be expected as each organization struggled with what it saw as separate problems. The CIA attempted to overcome the staggering incompetence and corruption of the newly formed Diem government. Diem's disregard of his advisors resulted in what might be the key missed opportunity of the period. The existence of CAT and a ready means by which to transit and expand control over sovereign territory would have allowed Diem and his government to counter burgeoning communist influence in the countryside, had they chosen to prioritize political action instead of retreating into the capital. The temporary effects of Diem's infrequent visits to the remote villages were insufficient—particularly in the absence of any other governmental presence—to bind the people to his political authority.

The primarily political character of this phase severely limited the permissible signature of American intelligence and military forces. Thus airpower took the forms of "civilian" support to the intelligence community and the US military advisory team. The small scale of the conflict necessitated the requirement to provide the appearance of a strictly advisory effort within the contested countries. This limited scale also makes it difficult, however, to assess the sensitivity of these operations to the degree of centralization of air assets. By all outward appearances, the underlying and largely ad hoc system that centralized and tasked CAT assets to support individual movements and requests appears to have adequately met the requirements of its supported agencies.

The state of the conflict by 1961, however, was one of increasing political instability and significant gains on the part of communist forces in both Laos and South Vietnam. The effort to counter this influence took a different turn towards expansion into the role of a more formal and sizeable overt military advisory mission. The introduction of military advisors into the conflict in large number would increase the demands on airpower to achieve strategic effects as the next chapter demonstrates.

Chapter 4

Counterinsurgency, Advisors, and Escalation: 1961-1965

I believe [the domino theory]. I think that the struggle is close enough. China is so large, looms up high just beyond the frontiers, that if South Vietnam went, it would not only give them an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya, but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists.

—President John F. Kennedy
September, 1963

Introduction: Advisors and Counterinsurgency

America's involvement in Southeast Asia at the time President Kennedy was elected in 1960 was largely of a covert nature and limited to advisory military and intelligence missions. By the time President Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961, the head of the Saigon Military Mission, USAF Colonel Edward Lansdale, had been involved in the growing conflict for five years. That same month, he completed a comprehensive plan for defeating the Viet Cong (VC) insurgency in South Vietnam.[1]

President Kennedy had committed to further bolstering the ARVN but had not agreed to cross the threshold of committing US combat forces.[2] By the end of 1961, the US Military Assistance and Advisory Group-Vietnam (MAAG-V) had been increased in authorized strength to just over 4,000 personnel—up from 685 at the beginning of the year.[3] By early 1962, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara pledged whatever support that would be required in terms of manpower, and in July urged commanders to consolidate short-term gains while making long-range plans for victory.[4] General Paul D. Harkins, Commander, US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (COMUSMACV) estimated it would take one year to stand up suitable ARVN, Civil Guard, and Self

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[1] U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume I. "Visit of General Edward G. Lansdale to Vietnam, January 2-14, 1961." Vietnam, 1961, Washington, DC. http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lansdale.htm. (accessed 31 March 2010).
[2] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 7.
[3] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 7.
[4] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 8.

Defense Corps defense units capable of defeating the VC insurgency.[5] McNamara responded with a longer term prediction: three years.[6] Regardless of differences in how long US officials believed it would take to defeat the VC, they agreed in principle on the military objectives to be met.

Admiral Harry D. Felt, the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC) detailed the expanding South Vietnamese military objectives to defeat the VC in December 1961: (1) gain control of critical areas and key facilities, (2) engage VC forces with a maximum amount of ARVN strength, (3) maintain a force near the 17th parallel sufficient to deter overt aggression from the north, and (4) sever VC supply routes.[7] CINCPAC designated US airpower's part in that plan to consist of the following: close air support missions for timely targeting of the enemy located by ground forces; tactical fixed- and rotary-winged movement of those forces; photo reconnaissance support; and, coastal surveillance to prevent infiltration by sea.[8] All of this was to be carried out by South Vietnamese forces with the assistance of American military advisors.

President Kennedy also greatly expanded US efforts in Laos beginning in 1961. Following years of effectively working around the limitations and "ineptitude" of the Royal Laotian army (also known as the Force Armee Royale, or FAR), the CIA specifically recruited a more capable fighting force from the ethnic Hmong clan by using a focused message that emphasized the drastic effects on their way of life that a communist regime would bring.[9] Both the Hmong and the FAR required comprehensive support and assistance in order to develop any sort of coherent military capabilities.

Political Restraints

The Geneva Agreement of 1954 continued to govern most policy and strategy decisions with respect to the region, as the Secretary of State publicly decreed that even

[5] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 8.
[6] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 8-9.
[7] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report "Part V, Air Operations OCT 61 – DEC 63." Unpublished Report (May 1964), "" 2-4.
[8] Project CHECO Report "Part V, Air Operations OCT 61 – DEC 63," 2-4.
[9] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 130.

though the US did not sign the agreement, it would respect its provisions.[10] This restraint posed serious challenges for containing Communism in Southeast Asia, given the limitations of the indigenous forces of both Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, increasing direct aid to the government of South Vietnam directly contravened the Geneva provisions, which prohibited the import of combat aircraft, naval combat vessels, jet engines, ordnance, and other types of military equipment.[11]

A second round of Geneva talks in 1961 resulted in a 14-nation declaratory commitment to the neutrality of Laos that explicitly prohibited the construction of bases or stationing of combat troops there. The US and the Soviet Union were both among the signatories of the 1962 agreement, which in theory prevented them from interfering in the internal affairs of the kingdom or attaching political conditions to any aid given.[12] Both sides initially made overt measures to comply, and by September the US had pulled out all of its Special Forces training teams, support personnel, and contractors. For its part, the Soviet Union ceased providing airlift support and turned over 12 of their aircraft to the Lao government.[13]

More significant, however, was the fact that the 1962 agreement proved to be unenforceable for the Soviet Union (USSR). Though the USSR had frequently provided airdrops, advisors, and aid to Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese regular forces operating in and near Laos, the Soviets found that they could not exert sufficient influence to make those forces vacate Laos as called for in the treaty. This had the effect of allowing the US and Thai coalition to continue fighting Pathet Lao and NVA regular units in Laos while the USSR turned a blind eye—as long as it was done without the use of American ground troops.[14] In effect, the US was free to fight communist forces without having to worry about Soviet intervention or direct confrontation as long as it did so without a large, overt military presence in "neutral" Laos.

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[10] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.* Volume 1, Chapter 5, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960." Section 1, 242-69.
[11] Project CHECO Report "Part III, Political/Policy Influences OCT 61 – DEC 63," 14.
[12] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 224.
[13] Conboy, *Shadow War*, 95.
[14] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 60-61.

Nevertheless, US officials remained concerned about the risk of provoking a response from the Chinese communist Party, or at the very least, inviting Chinese subversive activities. Chinese support to the DRV had already been confirmed through the capture of war materiel in South Vietnam.[15] In an effort to minimize the likelihood of such a provocation, the US DOD prohibited jet aircraft from deploying to the RVN. Secretary McNamara believed the use of jet aircraft at that point in the conflict would not shorten the military effort anyway.[16] This policy manifested itself as American advisors deployed in flights of World War II-vintage aircraft for the purpose of equipping, training, and advising—without participating directly in combat—the Republic of Vietnam's air force (VNAF).[17]

Those limitations would, however, have serious impacts in the event of large-scale Chinese intervention as was the case during the Korean conflict. It was the possibility of this more likely and more significant threat to American interests in Vietnam that shaped how Washington viewed the regional conflict. In 1963, Admiral Felt assessed the potential forces available for a communist Chinese invasion of South Vietnam to be 24 communist divisions combined with an air threat of 535 aircraft, supportable from 19 jet-capable airfields. PACOM further assessed that due to the comparatively smaller American force in-theater, the initial repulse of this force would require the release and use of tactical nuclear weapons.[18] This hedging against large-scale Chinese invasion, heavily influenced by the US experience in Korea, guided the thinking of those assessing strategic options from PACOM Headquarters and in Washington, DC.

To a lesser extent, maintaining the relationship between the US-backed government of South Vietnam and its neighbor, Cambodia, was important to stabilizing them and thwarting the spread of communism throughout the region.[19] The Cambodian government increasingly complained about South Vietnamese (and later, American) violations of the ill-defined and oft-disputed national border between them. Cambodia

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[15] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 9.
[16] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 11.
[17] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 80-81.
[18] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 15.
[19] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 12-13.

used these incursions to break ties with the South Vietnamese government and withdraw from American aid programs.[20] Although Cambodian leaders never outwardly acknowledged the fact, they seemed open to communist presence if not actual governance in their "sovereign" territory; North Vietnam war materiel would pass through its territory and its cadres would operate from the territory.[21] At minimum, American and South Vietnamese leaders had to devise means by which to combat the insurgency without pushing Cambodia further towards open support of the communist cause.

Not all political restraints were external in nature. The US ran the serious risk of alienating the Vietnamese people by actively supporting the Diem regime. The turbulent conditions of a post-partition Vietnam may not have been directly attributable to the central government of Ngo Dinh Diem, but his relatively weak influence outside the capital failed to prevent some of the internal strife, religious persecution, and anti-Buddhist activities that only served to increase the country's instability.[22] Every course of action proposed for aiding South Vietnam had to be weighed against the potential adverse impacts to the central government.

Strategy

Though no single-source overarching plan for the defeat of communism in Southeast Asia has materialized to date, the combination of declassified documents, statements of public officials, and the historical record of action in the affected countries provide a reasonable accounting of the overall strategy in place at the beginning of 1961. In South Vietnam, the US government was to provide advisory assistance to bolster the ARVN and the Civil Defense Forces. Additionally, CIA and Department of State advisors were to assist the Diem regime in improving governance and influence throughout SVN.[23] In effect, the strategic endstate was a South Vietnamese government that was responsive to its people, wielded its power legitimately, and could stand

[20] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 9.
[21] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 9.
[22] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 19.
[23] Ahern, *The CIA and the House of Ngo*, 28-31.

militarily against its communist neighbors—at least long enough for American forces to be brought in as reinforcements.

Though President Kennedy had not approved the exact methods by which the US was going to support Diem at the time he took office, by early 1962 the Strategic Hamlet Program became the cornerstone of the attempt to counter the increasing VC influence in the countryside and to develop a stronger bond between rural peasants and the central government.[24] The program was part of a 1960 plan developed by the US country team in Saigon to coordinate the government of South Vietnam's efforts at counterinsurgency and codified in the "Counterinsurgency Plan for Viet-Nam," or CIP. It was in effect an indictment of Diem's poor governance practices. The CIP proposed exercising a unified line of command with integrated effort at all levels of government and also called for the creation of institutions to coordinate national planning.[25]

In addition to internal governmental reforms, the Strategic Hamlet Program portion of the plan called for what has been articulated as a classic "clear-hold-build" approach to counterinsurgency. In this approach, insurgents would first be swept from a designated area, a permanent security apparatus would be emplaced for the population, and then the South Vietnamese government would build the structures of governance for the delivery of essential services.[26] All of this would, in theory, create closer ties between Saigon and the remote provinces, thus denying the communist guerrillas propaganda fodder, local freedom of action, and support from the populace.

As with any plan, the CIP's ultimate merit is closely tied to its ability to be implemented. The CIP was broad and sweeping in nature but short on details. In order to implement CIP quickly and efficiently, MAAG-V developed an operational-level plan[27] that specified the initial key regions in which the pacification program should focus: first were the six provinces around Saigon and to the Kontum area; second was expansion

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[24] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Vol. 2, Ch. 2 "The Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963," 128-159.
[25] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Vol. 2, Ch. 2 "The Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963," 128-159.
[26] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Vol. 2, Ch. 2 "The Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963," 128-159.
[27] Known as the "Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan for Counterinsurgency," completed in September 1961.

southward into the Delta and southward in the Central Highlands from Kontum; and third was the continued spread of governmental control in the highlands, combined with a shift of the emphasis in the south to the provinces north and east of Saigon (see map in Appendix D).[28] The plan also outlined a sequential, three-phased approach to guide operations. First, the preparatory phase required intelligence work and detailed surveys to assess the need for economic and political reform. The subsequent military phase comprised the effort to clear the region using regular military forces. The final phase involved the establishment of a Self Defense Corps, which would then assume responsibility for local security.[29]

Officially the Strategic Hamlet Program failed because of the inability of US advisors to force the Diem regime to implement the plan as designed or control Diem's Delta Plan. The Delta Plan was Diem's nation-wide effort to implement the strategic hamlet concept. Unofficially, however, the Program suffered from the American planners' inability to discern the contextual differences between the previous decade's conflict in Malaya, on which it was based, and South Vietnam, where it was implemented.[30] Diem's "accidental" death during the coup of 1963 effectively ended the first official pacification program, though similar efforts would be implemented on a piece-meal basis.

The lack of decisive results from the CIP caused a shift in emphasis during the summer of 1964 from pacification to staunching the flow of VC support into the country, despite official estimates that indicated the source of VC recruiting strength was the population internal to South Vietnam.[31] The main source of weapons for the VC was not the materiel supply lines from the north, but rather the armed forces of the South.[32] By December 1964, the CIA concluded the majority of insurgents were locally recruited, but

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[28] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Vol. 2, Ch. 2 "The Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963," 128-159.
[29] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Vol. 2, Ch. 2 "The Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963," 128-159.
[30] Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths : the Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1986), 198-99.
[31] Cable, *Conflict of Myths*, 223.
[32] Cable, *Conflict of Myths*, 225.

that much of the VC leadership and technical personnel were infiltrated into the country—estimated to be approximately 19,000 since 1959.[33]

With pacification faltering, key members of the Johnson Administration perceived the need to change the overall strategy to reduce the North's infiltration and support to the struggle in the South. The administration rejected proposals to increase the levels of the current program in the form of aid, advice, and pressure on GVN to reform, as well as suggestions for complete withdrawal or large-scale troop deployments. The only option remaining was a series of incremental and increasingly destructive strikes directed at coercing the communist Party leadership in North Vietnam.[34]

Airpower

Though the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had been arguing for the use of conventional military power in South Vietnam, their view was the minority in Washington. Among their ideas was the use of airpower to ratchet up pressure on the government in Hanoi and hold North Vietnam's industrial capacity at risk.[35] Even before the administration approved the ROLLING THUNDER campaign (discussed in the Chapter 5), airpower began shaping the conflict in each region. The next section broadly outlines the efforts and programs each of the participating organizations employing airpower in Southeast Asia from 1961 to 1965.

USAF

Elements of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron ("Jungle Jim") were ordered to deploy to South Vietnam on November 14, 1961. The detachment consisted of aircraft, crews, and support for four SC-47s, four RB-26s, and eight T-28s, all of which were marked with South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) insignia.[36] The original charter and guidance for the deployment was to train the VNAF to fly and fight against the VC in South Vietnam.[37]

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[33] Cable, *Conflict of Myths*, 245.
[34] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 106-268. See "July-October, 1964."
[35] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers*
[36] Project CHECO Report "Part I, Summary OCT 61 – DEC 63," 7.
[37] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 80-81.

The theater air headquarters, Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), proposed that the detachment—code named FARM GATE—not be limited to training and assisting the VNAF. PACAF's plan proposed that the American C-47 crews were to conduct aerial resupply, air drops of ARVN paratroopers, tactical intelligence collection, and psychological warfare. The T-28 crews were to conduct close support operations, visual armed reconnaissance, and interdiction. B-26 crews would conduct close support operations, photo and armed reconnaissance, interdiction, and shipping surveillance. In addition, a theater air control system element (TACS) and improved communications would be required to "compress reaction time" and to "permit full utilization of aircraft available." The Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC) concurred and received the approval for the concept during the Secretary of Defense's coordination meeting held December 16th, with only one caveat: that "a Vietnamese is on board [each aircraft] for purpose of receiving combat support training."[38] This shift in purpose and mission irrevocably altered FARM GATE's operational focus.

FARM GATE personnel also worked closely with American Special Forces and CIA operatives leading the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG)[39] pacification efforts in the South Vietnamese rural areas. This working relationship allowed the CIDG personnel to rely on a consistent, trusted entity for air support when villages came under VC attack. This also afforded the opportunity for FARM GATE aircrews to exploit CIDG-derived intelligence. This relationship was temporary, however, as FARM GATE's tasking chain was eventually centralized under the Seventh Air Force's TACS. CIDG advisors eventually had to compete for air support with the expanding number of ARVN ground units.[40]

With the increasing number of "advisory" and support aircraft came inevitable problem of how to go about requesting, commanding, and controlling the limited numbers of tactical aircraft and best apportioning the services of the support. This issue

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[38] Project CHECO Report "Part V, Air Operations OCT 61 – DEC 63," 5-6.

[39] CIDG was a program to organize, train, and equip South Vietnamese peasants for the purposes of defending their own hamlets and villages against VC incursion. It consisted of handfuls of advisory personnel widely dispersed among the rural populations with relatively little support.

[40] Thomas L. Ahern, *The CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam*. . (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2000): 58.Available online at www.cia.gov/foia.

would, despite numerous changes to the command and control system, organizations involved, and the rotation of key leaders, remain contentious throughout the duration of the conflict.

Though FARM GATE was specially designed for waging unconventional warfare and developing counterinsurgency tactics, conventional USAF units began to arrive in theater to provide other supporting airpower functions. The force structure initially deployed for this purpose was designed to enable the ARVN, and over the course of the four years evolved to include elements of tactical airlift, increased ISR assets, herbicide spray aircraft, psychological operations (PSYOPS) units, search-and-rescue forces, and a Vietnamese version of TACS.[41]

South Vietnamese Air Force

In addition to the authorization of MAAG-V advisors down to the battalion level, May 1961 saw the delivery of 25 A-1H aircraft to the VNAF and a Control and Reporting Post (CRP) for the purpose of training the South Vietnamese military in the use of radar to control aircraft.[42] The intent was to produce an air force capable of supporting its own troops actively pursuing and engaging VC within the confines of the border of South Vietnam while cutting off their lines of supply from the North. However, that mission proved problematic for both air and ground forces. Areas of known VC concentration were even given special zone designations in an effort to make engagement easier for the ARVN forces operating within them.[43]

The ARVN, however, was often reluctant to wage guerrilla-style warfare and pursue VC units into these strongholds.[44] The natural solution was to engage these areas with VNAF strike aircraft, but often the intelligence about the exact location of the VC was insufficient to accurately and quickly put ordnance onto anything that mattered. What pilots needed was valid target intelligence. Air liaison officers worked closely with the ground forces at division and regimental levels in order to specifically identify targets for interdiction. On some occasions, provincial chiefs themselves would designate free

[41] Project CHECO Report "Part III, Political/Policy Influences OCT 61 – DEC 63," 4.
[42] Project CHECO Report "Part III, Political/Policy Influences OCT 61 – DEC 63," 4.
[43] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 139.
[44] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 139.

areas for aerial attack. In these instances, VNAF crews could strike without the control of a Forward Air Controller (FAC), but FARM GATE crews were still required to have targets marked by a VNAF pilots flying L-19s.[45] Though the number of strikes increased dramatically, so too did the claims of civilian casualties and complaints by Cambodia of border intrusions.[46]

Royal Laotian Air Force

In Laos, the nature of the air war was unmistakably forged by the requirement for a modicum of deniability and the US's public statements of commitment to Laotian neutrality. The effort to employ airpower within the borders of Laos necessarily took three general forms. First and most prevalent—at least initially—was the training and equipping of Lao and Thai officers to fly combat aircraft in support of Lao Army and CIA-led irregular forces in the struggle for territory in Northern Laos. The second was the use of American airpower, in the form of fighter-bomber and forward air control (FAC) aircraft, to aid the effort to interdict men and materiel transiting Laos southward from North Vietnam into South Vietnam in the southeast portion of the country known as the "panhandle" (See map in Appendix B). The third general form of airpower was the use of CIA-contract air services, which would eventually include active duty military personnel on loan and performing traditionally military duties, such as flying as FACs. This third form frequently overlapped with the first two.

Not unlike the VNAF, the intent of equipping and training the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) was to provide an indigenous capability to the Royal Laotian Government for attacking communist forces—both external and internal—threatening its existence. In 1961, the RLAF transitioned from a supporting force providing liaison and mobility functions with a small numbers of L-19 liaison and C-47 transport aircraft to one capable of augmenting ground operations with firepower. Six converted T-6 trainers equipped with 5-inch rocket launchers and .30 caliber machine guns gave the RLG forces a much needed close air support capability—one that did not break the letter, if not exactly the intent, of the Geneva Agreements. Lao pilots could respond quickly to friendly ground

[45] Futrell, *The USAF in Southeast Asia*, 139-140.
[46] Project CHECO Report "Part III, Political/Policy Influences OCT 61 – DEC 63," 30-35.

troops in contact with Pathet Lao forces and strafe the enemy positions, though it appears the efficacy of the actual strikes was never thoroughly assessed.[47]

As to be expected, the RLAF experienced one of the enduring problems with the employment of airpower—that of how best to share a pool of limited assets amongst those who need them. As the RLG had divided up the country into military regions (MRs), each region was assigned to a separate commander. Thus air support initially had to be requested from the commander of the RLAF by the MR commander personally. The net effect of this arrangement was that the RLAF commander supported only those MR commanders whom he favored.[48]

The personal politics and relationships among the officers of the FAR and RLAF, along with their tenuous relationship with the central government in Vientiane, significantly shaped how the air capability was used. The FAR proved itself unwilling many times to venture into the highlands to contest Pathet Lao or NVA forces and eventually became a force of marginal utility in the eyes of the American advisors there. More than one coup attempt and defections of entire FAR companies to the Pathet Lao occurred. The withdrawal of US military advisors in 1962 only served to exacerbate the problem of instability, as the remaining personnel from CIA and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had other missions to execute.

The unsteady and marginal results of the air advisory mission prompted the US ambassador to request additional expertise and resources. The training and equipping of the RLAF continued but was eventually relocated to a more secure location as USAF's project WATER PUMP stood up at Udorn, Thailand in the early months of 1964. There, advisors from the 1st Air Commando Wing trained RLAF pilots in the AT-28, C-47, and H-34. Members of the Royal Thai Air Force not only assisted in the training mission, but frequently flew as combat aircrews. The increase in air expertise and resources, unlike ground forces, did not take root quickly. In the spring of 1964, RLAF completed just 96 sorties for the entire month of May. Two years later, by January of 1966, the RLAF

[47] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," Unpublished Report."" 4-7.
[48] Project CHECO Report "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," 7-8.

would be flying over 1,000 combat sorties per month in support of FAR and irregular forces.[49]

US Army Aviation

In 1961 President Kennedy concurred with a recommendation made by his military advisor, General Maxwell Taylor, to provide rotary-wing lift capability to the ARVN to overcome South Vietnam's primitive road network. In December, 82 US Army H-21 helicopters and approximately 400 men arrived via aircraft carrier at the port of Saigon, enroute to their forward base at Tan Son Nhut. Their charter was to support the ARVN units in flying range and they were followed the next month by an additional contingent to be based at Da Nang Air Base. These deployments marked the first overt deployment of aircraft with American markings and symbols (the helicopters bore US markings, unlike the USAF advisory mission aircraft in-country).[50]

Within days of their arrival, H-21 crews carrying approximately 1,000 ARVN troops executed a successful airmobile assault on a VC headquarters complex located just 10 miles outside of Saigon.[51] This operation represented more of a capability of helicopter mobility than a truly integrated heliborne assault force that would develop in subsequent years. Nevertheless, the surprise gained through airmobile transport to an objective proved initially to be decisive in engagements and neutralized the guerrilla's traditional advantage of mobility.[52] The Viet Cong were quick to study this new tactic carefully and identify its inherent strengths and weaknesses, as a captured VC pamphlet articulated in late 1962.[53] Among the advantages the VC perceived the helicopter to provide were the preservation of secrecy and surprise, the ability to land in rear areas,

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[49] Project CHECO Report "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," 10-12.

[50] John J. Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1989) 1; 7.

[51] Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, 15-16.

[52] Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, 29.

[53] Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, 26-27. "…We must therefore find means of coping with the enemy's helicopter tactics. Widespread efforts must be directed to combating heliborne landings and shooting at helicopters. Following are the advantages which the enemy enjoys due to his employment of heliborne strike tactics: 1. Careful planning and preparations are possible together with complete mobility in an attack, support or relieving role. 2. Secrecy can be preserved and surprise strikes can be accomplished. 3. Landings can be effected deep into our rear areas with the capability to attack and withdraw rapidly. 4. An appropriate means of destroying our forces while they are still weak…"

attack, and withdraw rapidly. Such advantages were offset by the inherent weaknesses of heliborne operations, such as the difficulty of withdrawing a small force when they are counterattacked, the requirement for the most up-to-date intelligence, the general unfamiliarity of the terrain such operations induce, the difficult nature of landing in forested or jungle terrains, the lack of popular support in the areas to which they travel, and the vulnerability to firepower inherent to the helicopter, particularly when landed directly on its objective position.[54]

The Army took an experimental approach to its development of airpower in South Vietnam, which produced some effective counters to the limitations encountered during the first heliborne operations. The H-21 was soon superseded by the UH-1, which was in turn quickly adapted to an armed gunship variant. These "revolutionary" platforms were organized into a separate aviation company whose specific mission was providing armed escort to the troop transport units it supported.[55] The move to arm helicopter units and provide organic firepower and support sparked numerous disputes between US Army and US Air Force leadership regarding roles and missions as well as centralized versus decentralized command of air assets.[56]

The armed helicopter was not the only aircraft perceived to be a threat by the USAF to its assigned mission set. Both the CV-2 Caribou tactical transport and the OV-1 Mohawk light observation, strike, and reconnaissance platform spilled over the gross weight limitations agreed to by the services a decade earlier.[57] By September 1964, the US Army was operating 406 aircraft in South Vietnam. In addition, the growing Army aviation force represented a serious challenge to the USAF as army advisors found it much easier to call on organic support for fires, reconnaissance, or mobility than submit requests through the formal system.[58]

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[54] Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, 27.

[55] Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, 29-30.

[56] This debate did much to shape the services' views on command and control of air assets, close air support, and several other key aspects of the employment of airpower; Dr. Ian Horwood covers the topic in depth in his book *Interservice Rivalry in the Vietnam War*.

[57] Ian Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry in the Vietnam War*, (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006.), 104.

[58] Tolson, *Vietnam Studies: Airmobility 1961-1971*, 39, 44-47.

Agency Airpower

By 1962 CAT was operating six subsidiary corporations in twelve or more political jurisdictions. Air Asia Co., Ltd., Southern Air Transport, and Air America were three such subsidiaries. In all, CAT employed 3,500 personnel and maintained 21 different types of aircraft.[59] Perhaps the most challenging aspect of CAT's operations in support of the CIA and other customers was the requirement to maintain the outward appearance of legitimate charter, cargo, and commercial air travel business operations—all subject to audit by the respective governments within which its borders the corporations operated, including the US Internal Revenue Service.[60]

One of the reasons for CAT's expansion was the increasing demands placed upon it. The CIA and its subordinate developmental organization, the US Operational Mission (USOM) , in addition to MAAG contracts, accounted for over 75 percent of CAT's world-wide flight hours for the 10-month period ending in January 1962 totaling over 53,000 hours. Declassified records show C-46, C-47, Apache (Piper PA-23), Helio, C-45, DC-28, and "helicopter" support to those contracts.[61]

CAT provided airlift, STOL, and rotary-wing lift capabilities. Additionally, the firepower provided initially by Thai AT-28s and later supplemented by Air America pilots, served to balance what had become, despite the insurgent nature and irregular forces involved, an extremely conventional series of seasonal campaigns (albeit on a small scale).[62] Company- and occasionally battalion-sized units employed maneuver and firepower against one another in the remote border highlands that separated Laos and North Vietnam. Airpower, primarily in the form of close air support, acted as a counterbalance to the Pathet Lao's strength in artillery. CAT crews were heavily engaged until the Geneva Agreement of 1962 was signed. In an effort to comply with the Agreement, the US removed its 666 military advisors and all but two CIA case officers

[59] L. K. White., Deputy Director (Support), "Inspector General's Survey of Civil Air Transport (CAT)" Memo for Director, Central Intelligence (DCI), 1 May 1962. 8-12.
[60] White, "Inspector General's Survey," 8-12.
[61] White, "Inspector General's Survey," Tab A.
[62] Ahern, *Undercover Armies,* 284-88.

from Laos. By May 1963, CAT pilots in Laos were doing virtually no flying and many were laid off.[63]

Analysis and Conclusions

The overall trend in the years 1961-1965 was one of disparate, locally-focused efforts. Though hardly integrated, the US strategy evolved into four related components: (1) contest Laos and prevent it from both communist infiltration and political influence, (2) reduce inflows of men and materiel into South Vietnam, (3) pursue the Viet Cong insurgents in the south, and (4) bolster the GVN in order that they gain popular support of the South Vietnamese people. These four efforts would continue to greater or lesser extent through the eventual American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, but the weights of effort and coordination between them would vary greatly in the coming years.

The restraints of the 1954 Geneva Agreements were supplemented with the additional commitment of the international community to the official neutrality of Laos. Unfortunately, neither the regime in Hanoi nor the communists already established in Laos complied, though the American ambassador in Laos made a concerted effort by kicking out nearly all of its military advisors and Special Forces personnel. It was to be a temporary departure, though as they returned following flagrant North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao violations of the neutrality agreement.

Airpower played an increasingly important role in both Laos and South Vietnam during this period of time. The USAF's effort to organize, train, and equip VNAF units to employ the T-28, C-47, and B-26 were hampered by PACAF's—and by some accounts, the initiatives of the aircrews themselves—desire for them to employ directly against the VC. This did not help the effort to enable the VNAF to fend for itself, as it was difficult enough at times to simply train the officers to fly, much less worry about doing it while engaged in combat missions. Though effective in the short term, the long-term impact of continued reliance on American airpower persisted to the end of the conflict.

For its part, the US Army mobilized the ARVN through the heliborne concept originally developed to offset Soviet use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Army aviators adapted their tactics, techniques, and equipment to exploit the maneuver and

[63] Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos."

surprise inherent to airmobile operations.[64] Despite these advancements, the concept continued to face severe challenges for the remainder of the conflict. Once the VC realized the potential weaknesses of the helicopter, they exploited them fully.

The US Army also relied heavily on its own assets for armed escort, ISR, and light mobility, much to the chagrin of PACAF. The OV-1 Mohawk proved a versatile platform with long-loiter and a modest noise signature. These qualities made the OV-1 a capable ISR asset that could double as a strike or close air support platform when required. For the units fortunate enough to be supported by OV-1s, it was simply much easier to use the asset to engage emerging and fleeting targets rather than submit requests through the formal VNAF and USAF channels. The US Army increasingly waged its own air war within South Vietnam.

US airpower, regardless of its source, had to appear to have a South Vietnamese face. The need for Americans to remain inconspicuous served two purposes: to avoid the public perception that the Diem regime could not handle the VC threat, and to avoid portraying an increased militarization of the American presence in the eyes of the Chinese and Soviets. The Johnson Administration was not yet willing to cross the threshold between the appearance of combat advising and direct combat. The exception was US Army aviation, which flew with US markings. The FARM GATE program was intended to build a VNAF capability, which would eventually provide a limited capability to support the ARVN.

Through the addition of helicopter mobility larger areas of South Vietnam were increasingly contested by the ARVN, which put pressure on VC organizing and agitating efforts. Previously, ARVN units and their operations were largely static, predictable, and well-known in advance to the VC due to espionage. The helicopter afforded ARVN the ability to achieve tactical surprise over local VC units. The difficulties in locating VC strongholds and areas of influence, which gave guerrillas their operational depth and strength, were an altogether separate problem. Despite the increase in the ARVN's operational effectiveness, helicopter mobility did not translate into as significant of a

[64] For details see Hamilton Howze, *A Cavalryman's Story: Memoirs of a Twentieth-Century Army General.* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1996).

source of influence over the population as it might have. One reason is that the nature of the ARVN's operations was transitory; ARVN units made incursion into VC strongholds for the express purpose of the combat engagement. No matter the outcome, once ARVN departed, the region became uncontested again and permitted the return of VC to the area. Another reason was the desire by senior GVN and ARVN leaders to bring VC forces to battle and defeat them, which mirrored the desires of many US combat advisors.

The corresponding ground efforts that attempted to build lasting governmental influence, such as the Strategic Hamlet Program, faltered for a variety of reasons. The most detrimental was the lack of importance of such initiatives on the part of Premier Diem. A closely related program, the CIDG, experienced some success in closing off access to VC cadre and infiltrators in South Vietnam and air support played a significant part. Without the availability of on-call firepower, remotely stationed SF and CIA paramilitaries would have been at the limits of the support ARVN ground units or other CIDG camps could provide. Unfortunately for those Americans living among the tribesmen of South Vietnam's rural and highland regions, they had little if any organic air support and their requests competed with those of the ARVN. This pattern would continue to play a part in future pacification initiatives for the remainder of American participation in the conflict, particularly as large numbers of combat troops began to require massive amounts of both mobility and firepower to wage the search-and-destroy campaigns beginning in 1965.

Chapter 5

Americanization: 1965-1968

We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else. Nor would surrender in Vietnam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

Moreover, we are in Vietnam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American Nation…We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Vietnam.

—President Lyndon Johnson
28 July, 1965

Introduction: Changing the Direction of War

The United States and its partner nations were losing the struggle against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia by the end of 1964. The Viet Cong were gaining ground. The internal political turmoil created by the assassination of President Diem had severely weakened both the civil administrative capability so critical to gaining popular support and wielding effective command over ARVN military operations.[1] Though the government retained control in the urban centers, it was increasingly contested in the countryside. In Laos, larger units of Pathet Lao and NVA attacked deeper into the interior of the country. The communists made gains in both influence over the remote highlands population and logistical throughput to South Vietnam. The trajectory of events pointed

[1] Ambassador Maxwell Taylor. "Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, Saigon, January 6, 1965, 11 a.m." "Until the fall of Diem and the experience gained from the events of the following months, I doubt that anyone appreciated the magnitude of the centrifugal political forces which had been kept under control by his iron rule. The successive political upheavals and the accompanying turmoil which have followed Diem's demise upset all prior US calculations as to the duration and outcome of the counterinsurgency in SVN and the future remains uncertain today. There is no adequate replacement for Diem in sight." http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/01_09.html.

toward inevitable communist victory without making some sort of major change to the war effort.[2]

Political Restraints

The most significant restraint on the American effort was desire of the President and his senior advisors to avoid drawing the Chinese or Soviets directly into the conflict. Though both nations were already providing advisory and materiel support, the perception of American leadership was that there existed a certain level of physical force, above which one or both nations would feel compelled to significantly increase their aid and assistance or intervene militarily. Though China was the more likely to use military force, the existence of Soviet advisors and military equipment at key North Vietnamese military installations also shaped debate about how much force could be used.[3] The main problem was that there was no way of being sure about the exact level at which the Chinese or Soviets might intervene, so even though the debate about what would achieve victory in South Vietnam included significant increases in American troops and airpower, the manner in which they were to be employed remained necessarily cautious.

Additionally, the US needed to keep military action in Laos to as low a level as possible in order to keep the weak—but more importantly, anti-communist—Laotian Prince Souvana Phouma at the helm of the central government. Errant interdiction strikes either caused civilian casualties or provided the Pathet Lao the opportunity to make such claims. The American ambassador and the CIA chief of station had to carefully weigh the permissible level of military and paramilitary action without de-stabilizing the country and inviting yet another coup attempt.[4] The Geneva Agreement restrictions prohibited military bases and troops but they were being increasingly circumvented by both sides.

The severity of the situation in Laos also had the effect of relaxing some of the earlier restraints. Prince Souvana began to understand the dire consequences of his

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[2] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.* Volume 3, Chapter 3, ""The Air War in North Vietnam: ROLLING THUNDER Begins, February-June, 1965,"" Section 1. 269-332. See "1964: A Year of Political and Military Decline."

[3] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.* Volume 3, Chapter 3, "The Air War in North Vietnam: ROLLING THUNDER Begins, February-June, 1965," Section 6. See "Efforts at Justification and Persuasion."

[4] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 218.

situation following the Pathet Lao gains in late 1964. His firm commitment to keeping Laos a neutral territory gave way to more practical concerns of losing his throne and country. The result was his acceptance of the American Ambassador's suggestion that Lao FAR units employ air support to push back the Pathet Lao.[5] Though they were not technically military, the use of Air America "advisors" in direct combat established a pattern of paramilitary workarounds to the limitations of the Laotian military while affording the opportunity to publicly maintain that Laos was free from American combat forces. The increasingly militarized presence in neighboring South Vietnam also eventually served to mask higher levels of force and conventional military support to the effort in Laos.

Strategy

A complex strategy emerged from the office of the newly installed President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson. The endstate remained the preservation of an independent South Vietnam free from communist influence.[6] The means by which to accomplish that endstate changed significantly in 1965. After much debate and little consensus,[7] President Johnson gave the order to initiate "a program of measured and limited air action jointly with the GVN against selected military targets in the DRV," the details of which were deliberately vague in an attempt to preserve flexibility.[8]

In spite of the administration's public rhetoric, the goals of the bombing campaign transcended physical destructive effects. There was significant hope that demonstrating American will and power in the form of destructive airstrikes—limited though they

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[5] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 191.

[6] This endstate, however, was quickly challenged by subsequent coups in South Vietnam and a focus on signaling American resolve. For details see Wallace Theis, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980): 19-23.

[7] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 3, "The Air War in North Vietnam: ROLLING THUNDER Begins, February-June, 1965," 269-388. See "Summary and Analysis." The JCS had been advocating a much stronger, more specifically "dramatic" and focused bombing effort directed against the North Vietnamese will. The civilians in OSD, the White House, and DOS preferred a gradually escalating approach, which emphasized the "prospect of greater pressure" was the key coercive mechanism.

[8] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 3, "The Air War in North Vietnam: ROLLING THUNDER Begins, February-June, 1965," 269-388. See "Initiating ROLLING THUNDER."

were—against North Vietnamese military targets would both strengthen the confidence of the GVN and cause Hanoi to re-evaluate the costs of supporting the VC insurgency in the south. An additional benefit of the action was the perceived bargaining leverage the US gained by being able to turn off the effort at will.[9]

In the background of the coercive airpower debate was the looming realization that the deployment of American combat troops might be the only means by which to achieve the US's political aims. Members of the Johnson Administration and the theater military staffs considered the options for what roles significant numbers of ground troops would perform. Initially, no plans involving offensive action against the VC existed. Though a small contingent of US Marines was deployed to Da Nang in March, the offensive against the VC remained the domain of airpower for the time being.[10]

Four key factors came together mid-year that influenced the Johnson Administration's decision to deploy combat troops: (1) the first three months of airstrikes against North Vietnam were recognized as insufficient; (2) the government in Saigon changed hands again; (3) intelligence reports about the VC indicated near-term plans to mount a major offensive designed to claim approximately half of South Vietnam; and (4) RVN armed forces, under threat of an unfavorable force ratio and with weak central leadership, displayed increasingly poor performance.[11] American combat troops appeared to be the only remaining option to salvage a free South Vietnam.

McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Advisor, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, COMUSMACV, Ambassador Taylor, and others within Johnson Administration's policy circle debated three broad concepts for their employment: (1) Security—the deployment to strategic locations within South Vietnam such as airfields and cities to prevent their being overrun and controlled by VC; (2) Enclave—a concept similar to that of Security, but extended outward to preserve entire populated coastal regions; and, (3) Search-and-

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[9] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 3, "The Air War in North Vietnam: ROLLING THUNDER Begins, February-June, 1965," 269-388.
[10] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," 389-485.
[11] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," 389-485. See "Phase I in the Build-up of U.S. Forces, March-July 1965."

destroy—the use of American troops and firepower to pursue VC and NVA units within the confines of South Vietnam for the purpose of eliminating them. The debate forced a fundamental re-examination of the acceptable outcome of the war. The Johnson Administration believed it faced the choice to either to commit to defeating the VC or lose South Vietnam.[12]

If the concurrent pursuit of a negotiated settlement bore fruit, the presence of significant numbers of American troops would only serve to strengthen the position at the negotiating table. A negotiated settlement, however, was not the objective. Secretary McNamara and his close advisors, known as the "Whiz Kids," believed that if Hanoi viewed the destruction of large numbers of VC in conjunction with the costs it was incurring through the continued ROLLING THUNDER campaign, North Vietnam might seek a settlement. But the administration's primary objective remained the preservation of an independent, non-communist South Vietnam and therefore the combined VC/NVA force on the ground had to be defeated. The administration had little choice but to implement the search-and-destroy strategy.[13]

In effect, the strategy for American victory in Southeast Asia by the end of 1965 was comprised of four distinct but inextricably linked efforts: (1) coercing Hanoi into ceasing its active support for the insurgency in the South, (2) preventing the fall of Laos into Pathet Lao hands, (3) militarily defeating the Viet Cong, and (4) creating a strong central government in South Vietnam capable of defending itself. Though all four operated concurrently, the relative effort put into each varied significantly over time. Rather than list contribution by service or attempt a comprehensive accounting, the next section will focus on the types of effects airpower contributed to the each components of this overall strategy.

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[12] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," 389-485. See "Phase I in the Build-up of U.S. Forces, March-July 1965."

[13] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," Section 1, pp. 389-433. See "Phase I in the Build-up of Forces, March-July 1965."

Coercing Hanoi

Outwardly, ROLLING THUNDER was billed as an interdiction campaign primarily designed to reduce North Vietnam's capability to resupply the VC insurgency in the south. Within the Johnson Administration, however, proponents of the bombing anticipated enough coercive pressure to result from it that they expected Hanoi to cease its pursuit of a unified Vietnam under communist rule.[14] The tension between inflicting serious pain on the regime in Hanoi and drawing China into the conflict caused the administration to operate on the side of caution.

Much has been written about the factors contributing to the failure of ROLLING THUNDER to achieve coercive effects.[15] The discussion here is limited to place the effort within the broader strategy of the period and link it to the attempt to defeat the VC insurgency in South Vietnam. Due to the political factors previously mentioned, it was viewed as risky and therefore strictly managed by the Johnson Administration. At various times the president dictated the details of the strikes, to include the target types, geographic locations, acceptable levels of collateral damage, sortie ceilings, and authorized transit routes. [16] The majority of the sorties were flown by USAF and US Navy fighter-bombers, operating primarily at low altitudes using precision bombing modes in an attempt to minimize collateral damage and unintended civilian casualties. Populated areas were for the most part off-limits.[17]

As Robert Pape summarizes, ROLLING THUNDER was conducted in four phases, each with a different focus. The first phase, conducted during the spring and summer of 1965 was primarily intended to coerce the Hanoi regime into ceasing their actions in the south. Washington attempted to wield a variable-sized hammer and the

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[14] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Vol. 3, Ch. 3, Section 1.

[15] See for example, Robert Pape *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War.* (,Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996): 176-95. Despite his study's larger conclusions based on the treatment of airpower capabilities as essentially equivocal between 1942-91, his identification of the factors that hindered ROLLING THUNDER's performance are thoroughly presented.

[16] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 4, Chapter I, "The Air War in North Vietnam, 1965-1968," Section 1, 1-58. See "A. July 1965 to the Year-End Bombing Pause"

[17] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 4, Chapter I, "The Air War in North Vietnam, 1965-1968," Section 1, 1-58. See "A. July 1965 to the Year-End Bombing Pause"

threat of increases to the bombing was the intended coercive mechanism.[18] The results of this first phase were dismal, as North Vietnam endured the limited piecemeal attacks on its infrastructure and resources and continued supporting the VC. Rather than weakening Hanoi's resolve, the bombing appeared to strengthen it. Furthermore, the attacks also bolstered support from Hanoi's allies, particularly the Soviets.[19]

To Hanoi, victory in South Vietnam was inevitable and the air attacks could be endured. As General Vo Nguyen Giap remarked, "victory goes to the most powerful. That was the secret method of the peoples' war. Thirty million people provided thirty million soldiers to destroy the Americans" and "an entire nation stood up to fight for freedom and independence."[20] The negotiating terms proposed by the US in conjunction with the air campaign were largely viewed in Hanoi as demands for surrender instead of a compromise.[21] The jointly-produced CIA-Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) end-of-year assessment of the bombing effectiveness asserted "There continues to be no indication of any significant decline in North Vietnamese morale or of any softening in Hanoi's hard line toward negotiations as a result of the bombings. Disruptive effects on the DRV's economy have been noted, however, in regime propaganda, and Vietnamese dependence on outside aid is growing."[22] After three years of on-and-off bombing with various weights of effort, ROLLING THUNDER ultimately functioned as a supplement to and not a substitute for efforts within South Vietnam.[23]

Defeating the Viet Cong

In contrast to conventional wisdom General William C. Westmoreland possessed a well-rounded theory of victory for defeating the insurgency in South Vietnam when he

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[18] Robert A. Pape, "Coercive Air Power in the Vietnam War." *International Security* 15, no. 2 (Autumn 1990): 118.

[19] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report "Rolling Thunder July 1965 – December 1966,"113.

[20] Quoted in Cecil B. Currey, *Victory at any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap.* (Washington, DC: Brassey's 1997): 252-253.

[21] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 3, "The Air War in North Vietnam: ROLLING THUNDER Begins, February-June, 1965," 269-388. See "Summary and Analysis."

[22] Central Intelligence Agency "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam." Intelligence Memorandum No. 3182/65, 22 December 1965, 1.

[23] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 4, Chapter I, "The Air War in North Vietnam, 1965-1968," Section 1, 1-58. See "A. July 1965 to the Year-End Bombing Pause"

was finally authorized American combat troops. His strategy, published in Directive Number 525-4, *Tactics and Techniques for Employment of US Forces in the Republic of Vietnam*, dated 17 September 1965, included the framework for a comprehensive ground strategy. His plan was to attack the VC insurgency with a combined approach of population-centric security and pacification efforts, complemented by aggressive airmobile-enabled search-and-destroy campaigns.[24]

Westmoreland envisioned a time-phased approach. His first priority was to halt what he saw as an imminent VC offensive, then seize the initiative and put the VC on the defensive through aggressive mobile operations. Simultaneously, the rest of the force would be used to bolster the pacification efforts in prioritized regions. Lastly, the country was to be restored to the control of the GVN forces once the VC threat had been severely diminished during the first two phases.[25] It was, at least prior to its implementation, a seemingly comprehensive and well-constructed strategic framework. There was a significant difference between General Westmoreland's theory of victory and what was actually achievable given the means available. Defeat of the Viet Cong hinged on two interdependent efforts: finding and engaging VC units, and isolating South Vietnam from outside resupply. The two sections that follow describe airpower's contribution to each of these integral components.

Interdiction and the Isolation of South Vietnam

The effort to physically disrupt flows of men and materiel were employed both as part of ROLLING THUNDER in the southern portion of North Vietnam and the air campaigns conducted in Laos. As VC activity increased in the south, so did the effort to replenish their supplies and replacement troops. Though some results were achieved, the requirements on the part of the insurgency in the South were relatively low. A CIA-DIA assessment reported that "US air strikes continue to place primary emphasis on interdiction of lines of communication in North Vietnam but have not significantly reduced DRV capabilities for logistic support of the war in South Vietnam" and "[e]ven

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[24], John M. Carland. "Winning the Vietnam War: Westmoreland's Approach in Two Documents." *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004), 553-574. www.jstor.org (accessed 14 October 2008). The entire document is reproduced on 557-70.

[25] Carland, "Winning the Vietnam War," 559.

with an intensification of air attacks it is doubtful that the capacity of the overland transport system can be reduced below the level required to provide logistic support at the existing scale of combat in South Vietnam."[26]

Phase II of Operation ROLLING THUNDER ran from the summer of 1965 for almost two years and focused less toward coercing Hanoi and more on interdicting materiel and lines-of-communication (LOCs) inside North Vietnam.[27] The results of this phase were mixed. An assessment completed at the end of 1966 concluded that without the ability to target the influx of materiel *inbound* to North Vietnam from its communist supporters, there was no chance of shutting down North Vietnamese industrial capacity or coercing Hanoi into ceasing its activities in the south.[28] The authors of the same CIA-DIA appraisal quoted above concluded that the bombing campaign had inflicted $430 million in damage to the North Vietnamese economy and military, degraded the North's capability for "sustained large-scale military operations" in South Vietnam, and led to periodic demands on the part of Hanoi for the US to halt the bombing. Despite these accomplishments, they nevertheless concluded that, "North Vietnam has the capability to support military activities in the South at increased levels of combat." [29]

The air interdiction efforts in the narrow waist of the southern portion of North Vietnam increased the relative importance of the arterial flow on the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and overland through Laos on the Ho Chi Minh trail system (see Appendix C for a map of the Ho Chi Minh trail network).[30] President Johnson advocated a "maximum effort" in Laos to shut off the supply route to South Vietnam. The concurrent deployment of combat troops to South Vietnam also had the ancillary

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[26] Central Intelligence Agency "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam," 1-2.

[27] Pape, "Coercive Air Power," 119.

[28] Oleg Hoeffding, "Bombing North Vietnam: An Appraisal of Economic and Political Effects," Memorandum RM 5213-1-ISA. (December, 1966). Rand. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/International Security Affairs. 31.

[29] Central Intelligence Agency "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam," 2.

[30] The Ho Chi Minh trail system was an extensively networked system of hidden roads. See John Prados, *The Blood Road: the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999.

effect of shifting the focus in Laos from resisting communist encroachments to actively reducing the pressure the communists were exerting in South Vietnam.[31]

As a result, two distinct war efforts developed within Laos: the campaign in the northern highlands to keep the Pathet Lao and NVA from expanding their influence southward, and the effort in the southern panhandle region to staunch the flow of materiel support to the VC—primarily through the interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh trail. Interdiction operations conducted in regions of Laos titled BARREL ROLL, STEEL TIGER, and TIGER HOUND linked ground-based intelligence assets and airstrikes to responsively target and destroy supply traffic. The effects generated by airpower in Laos were mixed as well. While thousands of trucks were engaged during these campaigns, the actual supply requirements to sustain VC forces in the South were minimal as they largely lived in and off of the population. Interdiction efforts in Laos were eventually consolidated under the umbrella program Commando Hunt in 1968, which would include increasingly specialized aircraft and sensor systems designed to find and engage traffic transiting Laos.[32] While the interdiction efforts did have some effect, they could never reduce the flow of support below the level at which it would sufficiently affect the insurgency.[33] They did, however, keep enough pressure on the LOCs to prevent the North Vietnamese from deploying large-scale military forces and equipment southward.

Attriting communist Forces in South Vietnam

The second half of the effort to defeat the VC militarily required US Army, US Marines, and ARVN units to seek out and pursue the VC in its base areas in an attempt to force direct combat engagements. In March 1965, two battalions of US Marines landed ashore at Da Nang with the mission to provide airbase security.[34] The following month, as the Johnson Administration shifted its approach to directly engaging the VC,

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[31] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 209; 213.

[32] For example, the introduction of the Igloo White system of air- and ground-emplaced seismic sensors, combined with side-firing, night-capable sensor-equipped gunships for increased loiter time and accuracy. For a full discussion, see Bernard C. Nalty, *The War Against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos 1968-1972.(*Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museum Program, 2005).

[33] Central Intelligence Agency, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam," 2-3.

[34] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," Section 1, 389-433. See "Marine Combat Units Go to Da Nang, March 1965."

COMUSMACV authorized the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) Commander, Major General Lewis W. Walt to shift its mission from airbase defense to conducting offensive operations in I Corps Tactical Zone.[35] By mid-1965, the strategy of search-and-destroy as advocated by General Westmoreland, the Chief of Staff of the US Army, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was approved by President Johnson. The president viewed it as the only remaining means by which communist takeover of South Vietnam could be prevented in the short-term and also as a way to set the stage for future troop level increases to ensure defeat of the VC.[36]

By finding and killing enough VC units that could not—in theory—sufficiently replace their personnel, American and RVN forces would eventually either reduce the numbers within South Vietnam to manageable levels, or the government in Hanoi would realize the high costs and futility of their efforts and cease their support. This logic drove President Johnson and his advisors to increase America's commitment by 44 battalions of combat troops in the summer of 1965, bringing the total number of American forces to just under 200,000. That commitment would ultimately grow to 107 battalions—nearly 525,000 men—fighting in South Vietnam by the end of 1967.[37]

In execution, the search-and-destroy strategy relied heavily on airpower to find enemy base areas, transport ground forces to and from the engagement, and provide fire support during large-scale sweeps. Airpower also served to execute strikes on VC base areas independently when such targets could be located with sufficient confidence. The next section briefly outlines the nature of airpower's direct contributions to the search-and-destroy effort.

US Army and Marine Corps Aviation

During the period 1965 to 1968, US Army aviation grew from a single aviation group to a brigade consisting of five individual aviation groups, each operating in

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[35] Jack Shulimson, "The Marine War: III MAF in Vietnam, 1965-1971," http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/events/1996_Symposium/96papers/marwar.htm (accessed 2 April 2010).
[36] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," Section 1, pp. 389-433. See "V. Issues."
[37] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers.*, Volume 3, Chapter 4, "American Troops Enter the Ground War, March-July 1965," Section 1, pp. 389-433. See "IV. Caveats," and "V. Issues."

conjunction with a supported army corps, plus a centrally-controlled combat support battalion functioning as a flexible reserve. Three general categories of aviation were employed: (1) organic aviation integrated into an airmobile division, such as the 101st Airborne Division; (2) organic aviation employed in direct support of a conventional, non-airmobile division;[38] and (3) non-organic aviation employed in general support of all ground units operating in a designated Corps Tactical Zone.[39] As the official US Army history states, "The readily available air assets were automatically considered in maneuver plans against the enemy, in intelligence gathering, in fire support, and in logistic operations."[40] By mid-1968, in-country army aviation consisted of 14 total aviation battalions and 10 air cavalry squadrons totaling more than 110 companies operating over 2,000 aircraft."[41]

The first large-scale test of the airmobile search-and-destroy concept came during the battle for the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. The combined effects of artillery, armed helicopters, and close air support, proved that the concept of air-enabled mobile sweeps could be effective at engaging concentrated guerrilla and regular forces.[42] Airmobility doctrine provided a new capability—the ability to pursue communist forces aggressively and quickly after they disappeared into the jungle and dispersed following contact. In the instance of the Ia Drang operation, follow-on sweeps and pursuit in the surrounding regions stretched into 35 days of combat. North Vietnamese and VC casualties were estimated at 1,800 killed.[43]

Ia Drang also proved, however, that the doctrine had specific limitations. One was the inherent vulnerability of helicopters to small arms fire, especially during resupply and casualty evacuation sorties, which generally occurred during the height of the battle. The

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[38] Generally, this support included one dedicated aviation battalion plus one air cavalry troop per division.

[39] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report , "Army Aviation in RVN – A Case Study, " (11 July 70): xi. South Vietnam was divided into four separate military regions, Corps Tactical Zones, numbered I-IV (See map at Appendix D). Three of the four CTZs employed a centrally-controlled aviation battalion to augment the organic lift.

[40] John H. Hay, Jr. *Vietnam Studies: Tactical and Materiel Innovations*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1989.): 22.

[41] Project CHECO Report, "Army Aviation in RVN – A Case Study," xiii.

[42] Hay, *Vietnam Studies*: *Tactical and Materiel Innovations*, 9-11. Estimated enemy strength at Ia Drang was two divisions of North Vietnamese regular forces.

[43] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 82.

VC also took note of the limits of fire support, and employed their time-tested "bear hug" tactic in close to friendly positions to negate the American firepower advantage.[44]

Airmobile tactics became more tightly integrated over the course of the next year, which translated into smoother execution. Eventually battalion-sized offensive operations employed time-synchronous actions requiring a minimum of communication. Infantry companies could be inserted into and extracted from the jungle in minimum time, which limited the exposure of the helicopter force. [45] Several other variations of helicopter mobility added to the ways in which American forces kept pressure on mobile guerrilla units. The CH-47 heavy lift Chinook enabled the emplacement and resupply of artillery batteries in otherwise inaccessible mountain positions, located such that the batteries could support multiple remote firebases or outposts, such as those occupied by SF or CIDG patrols.[46]

The US Army's doctrine of decentralized aviation support provided reliable and continuous helicopter support and lift to those units that were either designated airmobile or received direct support from an associated aviation battalion. But despite the growing numbers, helicopter production and stateside pilot training could not initially keep up with the demand for lift in South Vietnam. Other conventional divisions—and most of the ARVN units—relied upon general support from a centrally managed aviation brigade.[47] A similar situation governed the operations of six C-2 Caribou[48] companies operating by the time joint staff settled the USAF-US Army dispute over roles, missions, and platform capabilities in April 1966.[49] The USAF successfully argued it could better manage the Caribous on a "ton-mile" measure of efficiency, and the C-2s were transferred by the end of the year.[50] The effect jointly, however, was that the US Army no longer possessed a STOL aircraft capability that could be dedicated to units for extended

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[44] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 75, 81.
[45] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 87-88.
[46] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 95-97.
[47] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 102-03.
[48] Short takeoff- and- landing, or "STOL" aircraft.
[49] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 106.
[50] The US Army retained all authority for employing armed helicopters, and the USAF gave up its claims to rotary-wing fire support with the exceptions of search-and-rescue and special air warfare units. For a complete discussion, see Ian Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry in Vietnam*.

periods of time, and thus relied more heavily on its heavy-lift helicopters for unplanned movement requirements.

By the end of 1966, multi-division airmobile operations were routinely conducted, largely based on intelligence generated by smaller units like SF or CIDG. While the large-unit raids generally resulted in contact, the enemy had by then made a habit of dispersing into the jungle.[51] Even though the VC and NV regular forces adapted to life on the run from search-and-destroy sweeps, one of the effects of such operations was the forced expansion into previously uncontested areas. In some cases, as in US Marine-controlled I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ—see Appendix D for map), the expansion of influence over larger areas was part of their method for controlling and pacifying territory. Marine air capability not only enabled raids, but also provided a quick means to employ combat engineers to construct small airstrips first for STOL aircraft, such as the C-2, and then gradually enlarge it to accept USAF C-123s and C-130s.[52]

More often than not, search-and-destroy operations resulted in the temporary occupation of territory and control of the local area. The nature of such operations was that territory was held only as long as required to "clear" it of VC. In the event a more permanent presence was to be established by the conventional forces, a major construction project was required to bed down an airmobile division, consisting of some 450 helicopters.[53] Inevitably, at least for the US Army units, the mobile VC would shift to another region following contact, which would require a mobile response from the search-and-destroy effort. Though there was technically a pacification effort underway, it was not the primary effort for most of the force, and units capable of pursuing VC were expected to do so.[54]

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[51] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 124-25.

[52] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 130-34.

[53] Tolson, *Airmobility*, 199.

[54] Carland, "Winning the Vietnam War," 570-74. Specifically, General Westmoreland, dismayed at the heavy use of combat troops to provide base security, instructed his commanders, "As I have indicated on several occasions, I expect that US forces will be pushed to the limit of their capability in terms of the number and frequency of operations. Our troops must be in their base that absolute minimum amount of time necessary for their health and certain unavoidable maintenance problems," and that "I expect that our combat battalions will be used primarily to go after the VC and that we will not be forced to expend our capabilities simply to protect ourselves in this environment."

Though the US Marines were some of the first non-advisory ground forces deployed, their initial mission set was limited to airbase security. Due to the populous nature of the area surrounding their base at Da Nang, providing security was extremely difficult, if not impossible, without exercising some influence outside the perimeter. After multiple infiltration attacks and numerous destroyed aircraft, the marines adopted—partly out of necessity and partly due to their heritage of "small war" campaigns—a population-centric approach controlling the immediate vicinity of Da Nang.[55]

In terms of airpower, the marines employed primarily rotary-wing lift for mobility. In late 1965, marines began engaging in similar search-and-destroy sweep operations as the airmobile and cavalry divisions in the other Corps Tactical Zones.[56] The primary difference was that the marines tended to engage in sweeps less frequently. Securing the coastal enclaves was, to the marines, a higher priority, and they made concerted efforts to build airstrips at strategic locations around I CTZ for use by short-field capable fixed-wing aircraft.[57] The marines' priorities changed with the direction of General Westmoreland and the continued build-up in I CTZ. By the fall of 1966, a force of 60,000 marines had conducted 150 regimental- or battalion-sized operations, supported largely by the efforts of the 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW).[58]

USAF and VNAF

While the marines engaged in the northernmost CTZ and the airmobile- and air cavalry divisions conducted sweep operations, the USAF and VNAF provided support to the remaining forces operating in the southernmost region, the IV CTZ. A prime example was COMUSMACV's use of B-52 ARC LIGHT missions in place of large numbers of ground troops. In the fall of 1968, COMUSMACV reported to CINCPAC that "COMUSMACV retains these sorties under centralized control for concentrated use as needed. This gives COMUSMACV the means for influencing the battle without a constant shift of major troop units…All strikes are tied directly to a specific situation on

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[55] Shulimson, Jack. "The Marine War."

[56] *The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973: An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*. (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, 1974), 42.

[57] *The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973*, 46-47.

[58] *The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973*, 58.

the ground, i.e., in direct support of ground operations by friendly troops, or specific interdiction targets."[59] Airpower's kinetic effects served many times to make up for the lack of highly mobile ground forces in the southern region.

The ARC LIGHT program was far from problem-free, however. USAF leadership expressed serious doubts about the effectiveness of dropping such massive tonnage on what appeared to be largely empty jungle. Because of the remote locations and lack of organic sensors on the aircraft, little to no bomb damage assessment (BDA) could be captured, which meant there could be no post-mission evaluation of the intended effects. Additionally, the approval chain for ARC LIGHT strikes was complicated; it often included the local district chief. For strikes in Laos, the approval process could take as long as 15 days.[60] More importantly, collateral damage to local infrastructure was a consistent problem. Reports of unintended civilian casualties in 1966, after a year of strike operations, led to an assessment team finding one instance of 29 craters outside the designated one kilometer-by-two kilometer bomb box.[61] The relative inaccuracy of the initial ARC LIGHT strikes often had a negative impact on the affected population in addition to the VC they targeted.

In fact, most of the USAF's role in combating VC forces operating in South Vietnam was in the form of tactical airstrikes or intelligence support in the Mekong Delta region. Tactical jet aircraft deployed within South Vietnam for the first time in 1965: F-100s, F-5s, F-4s; bombers in the form of B-57s and B-52s; and A-1 and AC-47 attack aircraft made up the bulk of the initial deployments. Command and control was enabled by a TACS which provided a venue for aerial tasking and re-tasking missions. The TACS also enabled the fusing of intelligence reporting for the purpose of directing attack aircraft toward high-payoff targets, such as time-specific VC organizational meetings.[62]

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[59] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report , ", "Arc Light June 1967 – December 1968," 55.
[60] Project CHECO Report, "Arc Light June 1967 – December 1968," 50.
[61] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report, "Air Ops in the Delta." (8 December 1967): 13-14; CHECO, "Arc Light June 1967 – December 1968," 50.
[62] Project CHECO Report, "Air Ops in the Delta," 7-12.

Due to the fleeting and largely indistinguishable nature of the VC by fast-moving tactical airpower, FACs became the critical link between finding targets and getting another aircraft's ordnance load to the target. They not only performed the traditional liaison with ground forces, but also bridged the gap between intelligence gathering and operational targeting. Though USAF FACs had been operating in South Vietnam since 1963, the increase in strike aircraft in 1965 required a significant boost to numbers of available FACs. [63] Flying low, slow aircraft such as O-1 Bird Dogs and O-2 Coveys routinely worked over the province, day after day, as a means to gain understanding of the routine patterns of activity in the countryside and villages below. With a baseline to reference, experienced FACs provided intelligence on changing enemy dispositions to the TACS through airborne command and control aircraft.[64]

Some FACs actually communicated directly with the province chief they supported. When the FAC encountered what he suspected to be enemy, he could recommend dispatching a patrol to the scene. Visual reconnaissance by FACs became widely recognized as one of the more effective means of finding VC targets. FACs were often assigned to specific army battalions to ease the integration with a maneuver unit on the ground—with which he was intimately familiar—and a flight of attack aircraft that may have come from anywhere in the theater.[65] As evidence of the crucial need for this function, the Seventh Air Force commander established an in-country school to train FACs in the fall of 1966. The school's mission was to introduce standardization to their tactics, improve safety, and evaluate recommended tactical changes suggested from the field.[66]

Part of operations in South Vietnam included air support to the three ARVN divisions operating in the IV CTZ and the Regional Forces/Popular Forces (RF/PF) paramilitary forces. While ARVN generally rated close air support from USAF or VNAF air units, the relatively poorly equipped RF/PF units manned small remote outposts,

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[63] General (Ret.) William W. Momyer, *Airpower in Three Wars (WWII, Korea, Vietnam)*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press). Reprint, April 2003. 300.
[64] Momyer, *Airpower in Three Wars*, 302.
[65] Momyer, *Airpower in Three Wars*, 302.
[66] Project CHECO Report, "Air Ops in the Delta," 28-29.

which made them frequent targets of attack by VC units. The AC-47 units generally met the requirement to support this mission, as they were capable of illuminating a remote outpost under attack at night using flares and dispensing of the attackers with high volumes of cannon fire.[67]

Ultimately, airstrikes in South Vietnam, whether controlled by FAC/ALO or uncontrolled, served to make up for the lack of large ground force presence, prevent the VC from attacking in large units, and take back the initiative. By locating and harassing VC base areas, airpower aided in keeping pressure on and requiring the enemy to remain mobile and relatively dispersed. Though many other forms of airpower served to support and enable the kinetic effort against the VC, it was this attrition-by-air that sought to achieve the objective of militarily defeating the VC in South Vietnam.

Preventing the Fall of Laos

At mid-1964, the Laotian government forces numbered approximately 50,000 FAR regular troops plus another 23,000 CIA-supported irregulars. They outnumbered the estimates of the combined force of 20,000 Pathet Lao and 11,000 NVA regulars operating in Laos. The qualitative superiority of the North Vietnamese Army troops, combined with Hanoi's eagerness to provide support, offset the numerical imbalance.[68] The conflict in Laos appeared doomed to stalemate for the foreseeable future.

American, Lao, and Thai airpower made it possible for relatively lightly armed irregular forces—backed by close air support and interdiction sorties—to contest increasingly large numbers of Pathet Lao and NVA troops operating within Laos. Most of these campaigns involved units of battalion-size or smaller, though oftentimes the nature of the fighting was extremely conventional, with battalion-sized infantry units fighting from entrenched positions on both sides.[69]

USAF

Though the CIA and Air America employed handfuls of USAF personnel on loan prior to 1965, July marked the beginning of the use of conventional close air support and interdiction sorties in Laos. F-105s and F-4s supported RLG, FAR, and Hmong irregulars

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[67] Project CHECO Report, "Air Ops in the Delta," 15.
[68] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 211.
[69] Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, 160-61.

from a strip alert posture in Thailand.[70] The ability to harness the destructive power these aircrews brought to the effort was problematic, however. As the fighter pilots had neither awareness of the situation on the ground, nor the ability to visually acquire most of the targets, FACs became critical enablers—just as in South Vietnam—for getting ordnance onto the correct target.[71]

One of the early "improvised" FACs described the efforts to overcome the challenges this way: "We would fly in a U-6. I was nonrated, and there was often a Meo [Hmong] who spoke Lao and a Thai who spoke both Lao and English in the back seat. On the ground was a Meo and sometimes an American, who would point out the target to his Meo who then would radio the Meo in my back seat. He, in turn, would tell the Thai who would tell me. I'd call the fighters. Because we could not use marking rockets then, the first bombs were often the only method for marking the target. If the fighters hit the wrong valley, we had to start the whole process all over again."[72] Needless to say, a more professionalized and standardized program had to be developed.

The USAF's effort to develop an indigenous Lao air force began in the spring of 1964 and was composed of two primary components: Project WATERPUMP, the program to train pilots in the attack variant of the T-28, and a C-47 military training team.[73] Both were located at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, as US military forces were still forbidden to train or operate within "neutral" Laos. Additionally, a handful Lao officers also underwent training in the H-34 at a civilian program. Like its predecessor effort, FARM GATE, the first several months of the effort the cadre were torn between training Lao and providing the urgently-needed close air support and interdiction to the Royal Laotian Government forces.[74] The eventual solution evolved to include Lao, Thai, Air America, and USAF pilots alternately employing the T-28s. This complex arrangement, built largely upon the need to maintain political agreements between the

[70] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 26-27.
[71] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 26-27.
[72] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 26-27.
[73] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 12.
[74] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 16.

nations involved, was emblematic of how the effort to raise the RLAF would develop over the subsequent five years.

Royal Laotian Air Force

The RLAF as an organization suffered from extremely fractious leadership. Laotian T-28 operations were effective but periodically neutralized by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese sappers who attacked aircraft while on the ramp overnight. In at least one instance, enemy forces successfully attacked one of the small air operations centers (AOCs), which contained support functions such as weather and radar control.[75]

The factional nature of the RLAF complicated matters. It was composed of essentially four separate "tribes" and each operated independently from the others: fighter pilots, mobility pilots, base support, and general officers.[76] Molding the RLAF into an effective fighting force was problematic. Compounding matters was the tendency for the leadership of the mobility "tribe" to use its aircraft to move cargo for profit that enriched the officers involved. By 1967, members of the general staff openly feuded with one another over involvement in the opium trade and used RLAF aircraft to bomb one another's transiting supply.[77] Episodes like this emphasize the lesson that developing indigenous airpower required more than just teaching men how to fly aircraft.

Despite systemic problems, the addition of airpower—specifically close air support and interdiction—provided a much needed boost to the lackluster motivation and performance of the Royal Laotian Government's FAR.[78] Despite the advantages the T-28s, and later, A-1Es brought in terms of firepower to the efforts to counter Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese insurgency in Laos, command and control problems limited their overall effectiveness. One example occurred in January, 1965 when the northern outpost of Nam Bac was overrun by four battalions of Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese despite 125 T-28 sorties flown by RLAF and Thais in the previous two weeks of fighting.[79] During this time, a Lao military region (MR) commander who required air support had to

[75] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970
[76] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 47.
[77] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 47.
[78] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970, 22.
[79] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," 25-26.

personally call the commander of the RLAF, General Ma, to request it. If the ever-political Ma did not personally like the requesting commander, he denied the request. The only other option was for the MR commander to use the formal air request system and wait three days for a response.[80]

While individual aircrews performed admirably, the RLAF as a whole left much to be desired as an effective management tool for effectively supporting mobile ground warfare. In spite of the organizational difficulties, T-28 crews had provided moderate success throughout 1965 in assisting the Hmong irregular and RLG troops beat back Pathet Lao and NVA offensives, and the defense of Laos—that is, maintenance of the strategic stalemate—seemed reasonably assured.

But the first objective assessment, carried out in 1966 by the deputy chief of the US military advisory group in Thailand, reflected the larger implications of the effort by reporting

> The overall impression is of something just less that pouring money down a hole. Moreover, whatever terms of direction the USA policy objectives have employed are vague and ill-defined. Any directives guiding the application of tactical (or strategic) warfare in Laos today are virtually unrecognizable—and the period of our Laotian adventure will probably remain a thoroughly obfuscated affair; unprecedented and perhaps a buried classic of disorganized warfare. Unique in the annals of modern military history…Result: a costly war of attrition for the USA—one with no final objective defined…Friendly airpower has not been able to accomplish more than a partial hindrance to the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese in this remote and tangled area. I doubt it can ever do much more to increase its tactical influence in Laos under present rules of warfare.[81]

His ultimate recommendation was to increase dramatically the covert US program to compensate for the difficulties and limitations of training and advising the RLAF.

Agency Air

The program of covert "military" assistance to the Royal Laotian Government was carried out largely by the CIA through its primary air subsidiary, Air America.

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[80] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," 25-26. General Ma would eventually respond to a coup attempt by sending his T-28s to bomb FAR general headquarters in the capital city of Vientiane.

[81] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," 36.

Additional military personnel served "on loan" in a civilian capacity under the auspices of Project 404, which primarily employed USAF Air Commandos to carry out military air operations under the supervision of the Air Attaché in Laos.[82] Of critical importance was the addition of skilled FACs to the effort in Laos. USAF airmen flew as part of Project 404 in unmarked FAC aircraft, under the callsign "Raven," to integrate conventional CAS into the effort to support the FAR and irregular forces.[83] They also provided air and targeting expertise to the five regional air operations centers.[84] As they lived and worked alongside Air America crews, their efforts became indistinguishable from the rest of the covert air force run by the US Ambassador.

As the RLAF was in its infancy and experiencing institutional growth problems, Air America crews routinely augmented or entirely replaced RLAF T-28 pilots when necessary. Following one particular debacle during which RLAF T-28s got lost while covering an Air America H-34 crew attempting to rescue a downed airman, it became the standard for Air America pilots to fly T-28s during any search-and-rescue (SAR) event in Laos.[85]

Air America operated numerous aircraft, but the majority served to provide various types and capacities of mobility. The rugged terrain in the northern highlands made the H-34 helicopter an indispensible asset. Crews not only provided ready access to irregular forces on the part of their CIA advisors, but also a rescue and medevac capability in extremely austere locations, to include North Vietnam. H-34 crews rescued numerous aviators from their own ranks of Air America, but also the USAF as well.

A closely related capability was STOL aircraft, which provided a bit more speed and range, but required improvised landing surfaces. Aircraft like the Helio Courier and Pilatus Porter served to transport small groups of paramilitary personnel into regions where no prepared surface airfields existed. Larger transports, such as the Fairchild C-

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[82] Dr. Joe F. Leeker, "Air America in Laos III—In Combat." (1 June 2009). See section "Reinforcing the Royal Laotian Air Force." http://www.utdallas.edu/library/collections/speccoll/Leeker/history/Laos3.pdf
[83] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 232.
[84] Leeker, "Air America in Laos III" See section "Reinforcing the Royal Laotian Air Force."
[85] Project CHECO Report, "The Royal Laotian Air Force 1954-1970," 18.

123, were also used for transport and resupply by airdrop.[86] STOL aircraft and crews provided the consistency of movement around each military region that enabled the situational awareness and coordination required for American CIA advisors to keep in contact with multiple units. Without the ability to physically visit remote units, the advisors would have been largely ineffective.

Airpower in Laos—in all its various forms—provided the only available means by which CIA paramilitary officers, their Hmong irregular forces, and the relatively weak Royal Laotian Government could defend against the increasingly potent combined force of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army troops. By mid-1968, combined communist forces in Laos had nearly doubled to 100,000. Even though pro-Laotian government forces numbered 110,000, the balance remained skewed by the communists' 30,000 regular NVA troops, which were much more disciplined and effective fighters.[87] Without airpower in its various forms, massive numbers of American troops would have been required to hold Laos.

Strengthening the South Vietnamese Government

In conjunction with the efforts to defeat the Viet Cong militarily in South Vietnam, American agencies and military forces undertook efforts to bolster the strength of the South Vietnamese central government. Several key initiatives attempted to overcome the fractious nature of the South Vietnamese political and social landscape. Two primary avenues served this purpose: the establishment of government presence beyond the urban settings of the major cities—effectively a continuation of previous pacification programs, and the improvement and build-up of South Vietnamese military forces.

Pacification

Some form of pacification program existed in South Vietnam from 1959 onward, though once the US introduced combat forces in 1965, pacification efforts became a

[86] Much of what has been published openly about Air America's operations are accounts of various tactical actions and "war stories." Few details are available about how the air operations were integrated into the CIA's overall strategy…if indeed they were. Disparate—though highly entertaining—accounts can be found in Trest, *Air Commando One*, and Robbins, *Air America*.
[87] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 300.

much lower priority that engaging the VC directly.[88] However, by the summer of 1967, pacification efforts and program had re-grown steadily to the relative level of importance once held by the Strategic Hamlet program during 1962-63. The objectives were effectively threefold: (1) to improve security in the rural areas and protect them from enemy military activity, (2) to engage the sympathies and loyalties of the peasant and create a viable countrywide administration, and (3) to neutralize the effectiveness and appeal of the communist political apparatus.[89]

The means dedicated to these efforts included designated ARVN and expanded numbers of Regional Force/Popular Force units, as well as the Special Forces and their associated Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) militias that had been participating since the early days of pacification. By early 1967, there were 22 US Special Forces detachments operating throughout IV CTZ located in areas of political, tactical, or strategic interest. The marines in I CTZ ran similar programs under the combined action platoon (CAP) concept. The intent was to gradually expand the areas under South Vietnamese and American influence by creating conditions of security within previously VC-controlled villages. Though relatively well-manned and fortified, the camps at which many of these units were located were isolated and vulnerable to enemy attack. [90] Airpower served many times as the only feasible reserve force capable of responding to such attacks.

Though the effects on the local populations were difficult to assess accurately, the utility of airpower's support to these remote camps and outposts was documented by a Project RAND study conducted in the fall of 1967. Two RAND researchers spent three months visiting various outposts, talking to the local inhabitants, the irregular militias, and the military personnel executing the program. The researchers reported several instructive observations. Even though nearly half of the ARVN was dedicated to pacification activity, neither the USAF nor US Army aviation units routinely considered pacification efforts a priority. The Seventh Air Force Headquarters was largely unaware

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[88] Director of Central Intelligence. "Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) Number 14-69: The Pacification Effort in Vietnam." (16 January 1969). www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs_full.asp (accessed 22 March 2010), 2.

[89] Director of Central Intelligence, "SNIE 14-69: The Pacification Effort in Vietnam," 2.

[90] Project CHECO Report, "Air Ops in the Delta," 31.

of the program, and due to the decentralized nature of army aviation, the research team was unable determine the extent to which support to the pacification units was prioritized. Those working in the isolated outposts—particularly the RF/PF—had little ability to get support from or even communicate with nearby USAF FACs due to lack of either radios, language capability, or both.[91]

One platform specifically adapted for supporting the outposts was the AC-47 gunship, which began operating in South Vietnam on a test basis in 1964. AC-47 crews provided night coverage for ARVN and RF/PF outposts through ground and airborne alert, providing both intense, low collateral-damage firepower and illumination effects.[92] However, modifications to the side-firing gunship fleet were increasingly geared toward increasing its survivability and its effectiveness at interdiction. Thus, when the follow-on AC-130 gunship arrived in theater in 1968, it was specially equipped for hunting and killing trucks at night. The asset that had been specifically designed and fielded to support isolated ground forces increasingly was tasked to participate in the interdiction effort that consumed much of the USAF's resources.[93]

Though the outposts were essential means by which to retain governmental influence over remote territories, they rated low in the priority for airpower resources. Ultimately, the pacification effort would have to be owned and successfully operated by the South Vietnamese government. Though improvements had been made by the end of 1968, the history of the pacification effort had indicated the government generally only made efforts in this area under pressure from the US.[94]

Analysis and Conclusions

As American combat troops arrived in Vietnam in large numbers, airpower's role significantly increased. The overt signature of combat troops permitted military airpower to expand into its doctrinal roles and functions. Though the political restraints that

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[91] J.W Ellis,. and M.B. Schaffer, "Three Months in Vietnam—A Trip Report: The Paramilitary War.," RAND Project 1422. Unpublished Briefing Transcript, (16 August 1967): 23.
[92] Project CHECO Report, "Air Ops in the Delta," 14-15.
[93] Donald J. Mrozek, "The Limits of Innovation: Aspects of Air Power in Vietnam," *Air University Review*, (January-February 1985). http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1985/jan-feb/mrozek.html (accessed 9 November 2008).
[94] Director of Central Intelligence, "SNIE 14-69: The Pacification Effort in Vietnam," 6.

previously prevented American policymakers from committing combat troops to the conflict eased with the series of events that led to the passing of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, two key limiting factors remained. The continued worries over direct Soviet and Chinese intervention and the maintenance of the façade of Laotian neutrality restrained the military effort, which created adverse effects on the employment of airpower. Though the air war expanded into North Vietnam, the use of airpower not only failed to coerce Hanoi into ceasing its support to the VC, but also failed to sufficiently halt the inflow of men and materiel into the south.

In terms of extending the influence of the central government into the countryside and gaining popular support, most of that effort was sidelined as MACV put priority on large-scale combat sweeps. Search-and-destroy succeeded in killing VC as no other initiatives had up to 1965. As troop levels approached the half-million mark in 1967, there was little room for the VC within South Vietnam and few places where VC could mass or remain stationary for long periods of time. The combination of ISR, kinetic airpower, and airmobile ground forces placed the VC under significant pressure in the south. This pressure, however, did not mean the VC could not survive or persist. In fact, the levels of destruction and collateral damage in some regions may have better served VC propaganda and recruiting efforts. The transitory nature of airmobile operations failed to create a persistent presence that might have countered such propaganda.

The American, ARVN, and RF/PF forces that held down the remote outposts and enabled the peasantry to protect itself remained at the bottom of the priority list for air support, save for the AC-47 which was adapted for the task. Ultimately the useful AC-47 were too few in number. Toward the end of 1968, even they were increasingly used to interdict traffic pouring in from Laos and Cambodia.

The sheer increase in numbers of fighter and bomber tactical aircraft did, however, make up for some of the lack of priority to the pacification effort. The problem of timely response and target identification remained a significant barrier to effective employment of the force. The increased employment of the FAC as a means for bridging the gap between intelligence and destructive effects improved the situation for those isolated forces attempting to hold the countryside and keep the VC from co-opting the population in their respective areas. One critical enabler of the FAC concept was the

decision to dedicate enough of them in low-, slow-flying O-1s and O-2s to individual army battalions and provinces. Of course, this meant there were not enough to go around, but with a FAC flying over the same province every day, a much more accurate picture of VC activity could be developed. FACs dedicated to army battalions could build individual relationships with their supported units.

The effect in Laos was similar, but without the fixed outposts. The use of FACs on loan from the USAF enabled the mobile irregular forces to leverage large quantities of firepower when required. More important was the system of remote, unimproved landing strips, known as lima sites, which enabled Air America's growing fleet of STOL aircraft to transit the contested northern highlands with men and materiel. Without the lima sites and STOL aircraft, the irregulars would have either been defeated outright or would have been fighting in the major Laotian population centers instead of the remote highlands. Even though the STOL/lima site system essentially functioned in a transitory manner—not unlike the search-and-destroy sweeps—the key difference was the fact that CIA paramilitaries and their irregular forces remained in the field, near the region from which they were recruited. They did not retreat from that region back to a rear facility following action against the enemy. Their persistence, even when driven back in defeat, ensured the Pathet Lao would be contested. The highlands would never become a sanctuary.

The war in Laos also illustrates the critical nature of dedicated air support. The small numbers of irregular forces and the difficulty of the terrain in northern Laos made air support vital to both combat and sustainment operations. Without the critical effects provided by the Air America fleet and the borrowed FACs, the irregular Hmong units and the FAR would have been outmatched and overrun by the communist-supported Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Regular units. The criticality of this support is perhaps most evident in the fact that of the five military regions into which Laos was divided, each had an air operations center to control and coordinate the use of the Air America and RLAF air assets. The effects of inadequate air support with such a decentralized and thinly reinforced ground component were much graver in Laos.

Chapter 6

Analysis and Conclusions

But let men everywhere know, however, that a strong, a confident, and a vigilant America stands ready tonight to seek an honorable peace—and stands ready tonight to defend an honored cause—whatever the price, whatever the burden, whatever the sacrifices that duty may require.

—President Lyndon B. Johnson
March 31, 1968

Of all the disasters in Vietnam, the worst may be the 'lessons' we'll draw from it.

—Albert Wohlstetter

Postscript: Pacification and Withdrawal, 1968-1973

The Tet offensive—even though it was a military disaster for the Viet Cong that practically destroyed its functional capacity—broke President Johnson's will to continue pouring valuable American resources into a conflict that apparently would not end. The president decided not to seek re-election due to his concern over the deep division he saw in American society.[1] He subsequently suspended the bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel and renewed a call for peace talks.[2] Most importantly, he denied General Westmoreland's request for 200,000 additional troops, which would have put the number of Americans fighting in Vietnam at nearly three-quarters of a million. President Johnson's denial of those troops forced members of his administration to re-examine their fundamental aims in the region and to re-think the assumption that additional military force could achieve the US's original political objectives.[3] A new commander, General Creighton Abrams, refocused American strategy toward the pacification effort that had been marginalized since 1963.

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[1] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers*, Volume 4, Chapter 2, "U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments, 1965-1968," Section 4, 538-604. See "Epilogue."
[2] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 297.
[3] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers*, Volume 4, Chapter 2, "U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments, 1965-1968," Section 4, 538-604. See "Epilogue."

In Laos, the North Vietnamese continued to both augment the Pathet Lao and devise new routes and methods to circumvent the interdiction efforts on the Ho Chi Minh trail. In 1968, the CIA estimated a combined force of 100,000 Pathet Lao and NVA troops operating in the country.[4] Eventually, years of fighting without a suitable population base from which to recruit caused the overall numbers of Hmong and other irregulars available to continue the struggle against communism to dwindle. The FAR became dependent on American airpower to the point that it could no longer mount an offensive action without it.[5] In February 1973, the Vientiane Agreement effectively ended American participation in hostilities in Laos.[6]

Recap

This study began with a question: Why do we need a theory of airpower and IW? Within this question were two fundamental ones: What makes the concept of irregular warfare "irregular"? Is there anything fundamentally different about the employment of airpower in IW? In order to better understand exactly what is unique to irregular warfare, the study began with the premise that irregular warfare still conforms to the essence of war; it is waged for political purposes, characterized by the use of violence, and conducted to render an enemy powerless. From this premise, the study defined the structural interaction that characterizes irregular warfare. It outlined three essential elements of IW: (1) a political object, in the form of governing power (2) the employment of systematic violence, and (3) asymmetric limitations to the use of force unique to each side.

The study then briefly examined the relevant airpower history and doctrine to illustrate how the predominant view of airpower reflects a functional classification of what are essentially aircraft capabilities. In IW, the most frequently touted capabilities are mobility, resupply, fire support, and ISR. These aggregate functional groupings mask the understanding of airpower's value in IW by diluting and obscuring airpower's effects. Three unique characteristics govern the employment of airpower in IW to a greater

[4] Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 300.
[5] Project Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) Southeast Asia Report, ""Air War in Northern Laos, 1 April – 30 November 1971,"(22 June 1973): 1.
[6] Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 134.

degree than they do in traditional warfare: (1) a greater subordination to political restraints; (2) a higher sensitivity to the degree of centralization of control; and (3) the primacy of indirect effects, better characterized as *influence.*

Using the American experience in three discrete phases of the Vietnam War, the study examined the qualitative aspects of airpower in IW with respect to the objectives and strategy of the US military and civilian leadership. This particular choice of case studies was somewhat problematic, as it stretched the definition of irregular warfare established in Chapter 1: "a form of conflict characterized primarily by violent struggle between state and nonstate actors," as much of the fighting toward the later conflict periods occurred between conventional forces. Nevertheless, irregular warfare dominated the conflict throughout each of the case periods. The following section evaluates the theoretical propositions against the results of each case.

Political Restraints Set the Rules of the Contest

Every military action is subject to some form of political restraint, either foreign, domestic, or the combination thereof. The character of irregular warfare—"local politics with guns"—makes the application of airpower inherently problematic for two primary reasons. The first is external. The signature created by aircraft—particularly those easily identifiable as American aircraft—communicates a message in and of itself. The early years of the conflict in Southeast Asia showed that in order to exploit the advantages airpower could provide without signaling the intent of national commitment, the identity of the air force had to be masked. In addition, in order to support the legitimacy of the host nation, the air force should appear as if it belonged to that nation. Operations in Laos had to occur under the guise of the regional treaty committing Laos to neutrality. Therefore the only airpower permissible had to appear civilian. In South Vietnam, the first US Air Force units actually repainted their aircraft to match the markings of the VNAF. Without these measures, there could have been no use of airpower without the risk of escalation to primarily military means.

The second reason is internal. The use of military force may increase the temporary strength of a supported central government but paradoxically might weaken it in the long term. A direct linkage exists between an occupying military force and the perceived legitimacy of a supported government. The level of violence employed by the

military force affects this linkage. In Laos, the increase in airstrikes that accompanied the interdiction campaigns diminished the popular support of the government in Vientiane. Though large-scale military force may be required to prevent a non-state actor from prevailing, the objective of the conflict remains political.

Centralized Control May Not be Sufficient

Two key examples from the case studies support the proposition that the degree of centralization of control has a greater impact on airpower's effectiveness in irregular warfare. First is the effectiveness of assigning a FAC to a specific unit operating in a specific area or province on a daily basis. This practice is at odds with the doctrinal concept of centralized control and decentralized execution. The FAC, by operating consistently with the same unit or even provincial leadership, built a much more intimate knowledge of his region. This calls into question the more fundamental issue of the primacy of effectiveness over efficiency. It also begs a more fundamental question: Were the effects achieved by the centrally-controlled FACs qualitatively different, and did that matter to the units they supported?

There is little doubt that a FAC with intimate knowledge of his region better understands the events there. This knowledge is vital when the enemy remains elusive and is largely hidden by jungle or blends into the local population. The enemy's local pattern of activity is much more important that the momentary visual signature. Gaining such understanding requires time but the effects the FAC provided ultimately served the purpose of finding the elusive enemy. This effect is qualitatively different than FACs who operate in different territory daily and only spot fleeting targets. Such nuanced differences unfortunately are masked by the functional labels "close air support" and "ISR."

The second example of sensitivity to the degree of centralization is the availability of airpower for movement. Air operations in Laos were necessarily delegated down to the military region level so that each air operations center provided consistent airpower to those paramilitary officers and irregular forces that needed it most. This system still functioned with a degree of centralized control, since the individual aircraft and crews were managed at a level above the units they were supporting. However, the tasking authority was delegated down to individuals. These individuals had the situational

awareness required to prioritize and deconflict one request over another at the regional level. This does not suggest that the management of the air war in Laos was perfect, but rather illustrates how the effects of airpower can become so integral to operations that consistency may be more important than optimal efficiency. The net strategic effect may outweigh the marginal benefits gained by optimizing sortie rates and tonnage moved.

Influence as a Way of Thinking about Airpower

According to the theoretical propositions of Chapter 1, if a state gives up space geographically or cognitively a non-state actor can and will fill it. Thus an effective state strategy must account for such efforts. In the absence of possessing the requisite means (i.e. military and police forces), to exert control everywhere, a state must make intelligent choices about where to exert influence in order to deny control by the opponent. The concept of influence better describes the capacity to challenge the non-state actor using the combination of kinetic and non-kinetic airpower effects. Extending the reach of the government, resupplying outposts, interdicting enemy bases, reconnoitering remote regions—these are all air-centric activities that serve to influence both the minds of the enemy and the host population. Any strategic approach to the employment of airpower in irregular warfare must consider influence as its governing concept.

Several examples demonstrated the validity of this proposition. The CIA's paramilitary operations in Laos provided a glimpse into what airpower-enabled but largely locally- or regionally-focused troops could accomplish. The ability of the Hmong irregulars, supported by airpower and CIA funding, largely bore the brunt of the effort against numerically superior Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese regulars. The Hmong controlled territory for long periods of time, and more importantly retained the allegiance of the population of the region in no small part due to their ethnic and tribal ties there. The result of these efforts was that CIA exerted influence throughout Northern Laos and prevented the Pathet Lao and NVA from taking over the country. Though the CIA and its irregular forces could never expel the insurgents, they could always contest the battlespace.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, two key recommendations are in order. The first is for the joint community to clearly define irregular warfare in doctrine. Historically the DOD and the armed services have suffered from what can be called "definition deficit disorder" in which terms are created and discarded regularly. By limiting and more clearly defining irregular warfare, the author hopes it will not be discarded for yet another new term or phrase. Specifically, this thesis recommends the definition developed in Chapter 1: "a form of conflict characterized primarily by violent struggle between state and nonstate actors." This definition eliminates the implication that the population is always at the center of irregular warfare, which pre-supposes a solution to a problem. Additionally, irregular warfare doctrine should be officially limited to those efforts involving: (1) the violent destruction of an existing political power structure, either locally or in its entirety, as in unconventional warfare, insurgency, and rebellion; and (2) the maintenance of an existing political power by force, such as counterinsurgency and foreign internal defense. Other concepts associated with irregular warfare, such as terrorism, counterterrorism, psychological operations, and stability/reconstruction operations, can be dealt with for what they are—subordinate tactics.

Perhaps equally important is the recognition that irregular warfare in definition and theory is much different from irregular warfare in practice. The American experience in Vietnam and Laos suggests that that the idea of an independent or exclusive single form of warfare is a fiction. Therefore the US military must continue to define and understand war in all its forms within its professional military education and not just traditional warfare. In addition, the responsibility to conduct and combat irregular warfare cannot be left just to a specialized portion of the force. This is particularly true for the US Air Force, which has exhibited the historical tendency to specialize and compartmentalize its force for the ease of organizing, training, and equipping.

The second recommendation for the US Air Force is to move away from solely functional descriptions of airpower in its irregular warfare doctrine. They are simply transplants from the basic service doctrine that do as much to obscure airpower's contribution to irregular warfare as they define it. Functions are necessary but cannot

serve as the entire basis for understanding airpower's contribution to warfare. What is lost conceptually by defining airpower in this way is the mechanism which links functions to the strategic outcomes, particularly in irregular warfare campaigns. Only when airmen think beyond the constraints of functionality and the proprietary platforms of their respective services can they make that link. To that end, the USAF must adopt an influence-centric approach to airpower doctrine for irregular warfare in place of the target-centric one it has now.

This study has attempted to illustrate the inherent yet elusive attributes airpower brings to IW. It concludes with an example of the influence of airpower in IW at the tactical level in Laos:

> I would cable Landry explaining that I had to go to this or that village and needed a Helio for the day, and early the next morning, one would arrive…I sometimes went alone. On those occasions a lot depended on the availability of French (or sometimes even English) speakers. In the villages that I visited, we would talk about what nearby enemy units were doing and about needs of all kinds. We supplied everything from weapons and ammunition to schoolbooks, medicines, rice and salt, uniforms, building materials, and money. For some of these things, I was simply the middleman making arrangements for an [US Agency for International Development] delivery to a given village. Sometimes, no plane was available or the place I was going had no landing strip, so I would take a Hmong patrol and a couple of the PARU[7] and walk. We limited these walks to distances that could be covered in less than two days, round trip. More than that took too much of my time.[8]

To an airman, the mission above falls easily into the airpower function of "mobility." But a careful reading will reveal that the one individual, utilizing airpower, gathered intelligence and provided logistical and educational support, as well as reconstruction material and economic benefits to an impoverished and ungoverned space. The movement of this individual by, with, and through the air generated effects that reached far beyond his tactical transport. One must consider the potential effects of

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[7] Police Aerial Resupply Unit (PARU); Thai Special Forces-like units assisting the American effort to train and equip the Hmong irregulars.

[8] Richard L. Holm, "Recollections of a Case Officer in Laos, 1962-1964: No Drums, No Bugles." *Studies in Intelligence* 47, no. 1: https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol47no1/article01.html. See section titled "Flying…and Walking."

dependable, routine movements in contested or ungoverned spaces. This is the essence of what airpower can bring to irregular warfare. We as airmen must do better at articulating and defining it—if for no other reason that our successors will not have to figure it out for themselves…again.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF INDOCHINA

Source: http://history.sandiego.edu/cdr2/USPics/vietmapC.jpg

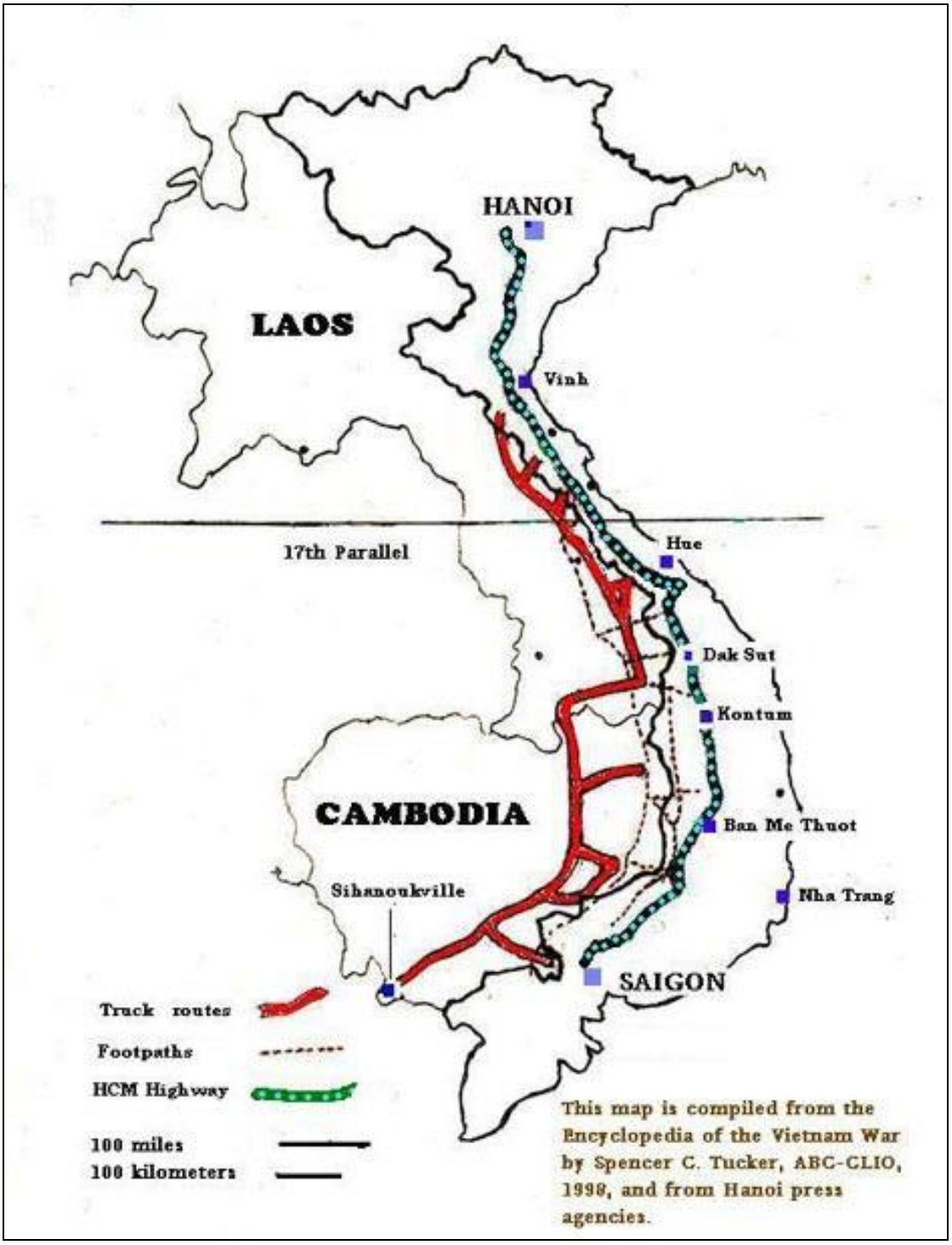
APPENDIX B

MAP OF LAOS

Source: www.geographicguide.net/asia/maps/laos-map.jpg

APPENDIX C

MAP OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL



Source: Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War,1998

APPENDIX D

MAP OF SOUTH VIETNAM ADMINISTRATIVE AND MILITARY REGIONS

Source: http://www.rivervet.com/images/vnprovincemap.jpg

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